



Culture,  
Politics,  
and  
Nationalism  
in a Serbian  
Intellectual  
Circle,  
1944–1991

# THE NONCONFORMISTS

By Nick Miller



VISIT...

LANZAROTE  
*Caliente*.COM

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Culture, Politics, and Nationalism in a  
Serbian Intellectual Circle, 1944–1991

Nick Miller



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*To Lynn and Nicky*





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# Preface

By now the general outlines of a historical analysis of the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s have emerged. First journalists and then social scientists had their say. The journalists have moved on to new topics; social scientists continue their work. Historians, typically more methodical, have begun to contribute to the scholarly debate. They do so at a time when the majority of work on the collapse of Yugoslavia has perpetuated three tendencies: it places politics at the center of the interpretation, it relies too much on historical analogy, and it ultimately describes rather than explains. These are all natural inclinations, given the predominance of journalists among the early interpreters of the collapse. The first tendency needs little more than to be stated: any perusal of the books written in the last ten years on the Yugoslav situation will demonstrate that the vast majority treat the collapse of Yugoslavia as a function of power relations in the state.<sup>1</sup> Thus we have been consumed by the way that Slobodan Milošević came to power, relations between Serbia and Slovenia, comparisons of the validity of the grievances of the various ethnic groups, the wars themselves, and other such topics. In such discussions, Serbian nationalism is a fixed entity, a given that is never critically analyzed.

The second tendency, to rely too much on historical analogy, serves the first: for many commentators, explanation consists of illustrations of the ways that Serbian behavior today mimics Serbian behavior of earlier eras. On the most general level, the ubiquitous “ancient hatreds” approach serves as an excellent example. But one of the most popular recent histories of the Serbs all but presents Serbian history as a series of comparative vignettes: Milošević acts as Ilija Garašanin or Prince Lazar did in earlier times, Biljana Plavšić becomes the Kosovo Maiden, the past and the present become virtually identical, and

understanding is left to the reader's imagination, which has been corrupted irreversibly by the images presented by the writer.<sup>2</sup> The picture that emerges from such an approach is of a Serbia captive to its own history, of Serbs incapable of change, of Serbs who are not rational beings.

The third tendency follows from the other two: if Serbs simply *are* what they always have been, and what they always have been is a xenophobic and aggressive people, and the 1990s are just another example of all of that, then the outsider merely must describe that situation rather than explain it. Such an approach, it now seems to me, has led to unsophisticated and reductionist treatments of Serbia and Serbs, who appear in most interpretations as fundamentally nationalistic, self-absorbed, and self-serving, tending towards authoritarianism, unable to escape their past, and incapable of living with the nations with whom they share(d) territory.

I am critical of these tendencies. In examining the work of three influential Serbian intellectuals from different fields, I will argue that cultural processes are too often ignored in favor of political ones; that Serbian intellectuals do work within a historical context, but that they are not slaves to the past; that Serbian history is not a continuous reiteration of static themes. My subjects are Dobrica Ćosić (a novelist), Mića Popović (a painter) and Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz (a literary critic). These three men were part of a circle of friends who began the postwar with open minds about the promise of the new communist order and who wound up by 1974 as inveterate opponents of the regime and nationalists. The group included Ćosić, Popović, Mihiz, Mihailo Djurić, Pavle Ivić, Živorad Stojković, Vojislav Djurić, Dejan Medaković and several others. I focus on Ćosić, Mihiz, and Popović for various reasons. Ćosić was central: he was one of Serbia's most popular novelists, credited with being the father of Serbian nationalism, and advisor and spiritual guide to Kosovo Serb activists. No informed student of Serbian nationalism or intellectuals could exclude him. The other two I chose for different reasons. Popović was a painter, and the simple fact that he expressed his opposition to communism and eventually his profound nationalism via the canvas rather than the written word appealed to me. But, ultimately, it would be Popović's contributions to Ćosić's worldview that would make him an essential part of my analysis. Mihiz, a close friend but ideological opponent of

Ćosić and, to a much lesser degree, Popović, would differ from the other two in his intellectual development; he is the constant in the story—never much of a friend of communism and always a sincere nationalist.

These were intellectuals whose creative and political trajectories indicate that nationalism was more than a tool for cynical and needy politicians and less an ancient bequest than an unsurprising response to real conditions in Tito's Yugoslavia. Their initial attitudes toward the communist regime varied widely, from the profound if muted hostility of Mihiz to the conditional embrace of Popović to the enthusiastic participation of Ćosić. Initially, they all—even Mihiz—had certain hopes for the revolutionary communist movement in Yugoslavia. In each case, those hopes were universal and humanistic; they applied equally to all citizens of the new Yugoslavia. In their very humanism the seeds of failure sprouted, since the Tito regime was unwilling or unable to satisfy this one's desire to develop a new universalist culture, that one's faith in the regime's commitment to social justice.

A critical part of my analysis of these men and their shifting ideological commitments will be their relationship to the creative and destructive goals of communism. Ćosić saw communism as a means to the complete transformation of Serbia, Yugoslavia, and the people who populated it. His Jacobin faith in the creative possibilities of communism led him to the conclusion that much of what actually existed in Serbia and the rest of Yugoslavia had to be destroyed, which sets up the key to understanding the differences in my three subjects as well as the key to understanding their responses to communism over the succeeding four decades. Mihiz, for instance, rejected Ćosić's belief in the need to destroy the Serbian cultural and political inheritance in order to create an entirely new world. Instead, he would come to argue that the greatest crime of communism was in fact its need and desire to destroy the old—which was precisely what drew his friend Ćosić to the ideology. Until the late 1950s, Popović existed in an undefinable zone between Ćosić and Mihiz; when he settled on a style of painting, it was an almost nihilistic form of abstract expressionism that responded to his desire to destroy *everything*. Soon thereafter he adopted a hyper-realistic and engaged style. My point is that one underlying motivating factor for my three figures is their understanding of communism's destructive and creative impulses.

For all, the moment of truth came in the late 1960s, but for different reasons: for Ćosić, the moment came between 1966 and 1968, after the fall of Aleksandar Ranković and as Albanian nationalism grew in Kosovo; for Popović, it came as students demonstrated at the University of Belgrade in 1968, emphasizing the failure of the regime to provide job opportunities; for Mihiz, it came when the Tito regime did not do enough to combat Croatian nationalists in the late 1960s. Whatever the cause of the revelation, each nonetheless drew the conclusion that Titoism was an empty promise. For each of them, the events of the 1960s and 1970s gave birth to the notion that Serbs were especially poorly treated in Yugoslavia. Ćosić, undoubtedly the most important of my three subjects in terms of general influence, framed the Serbian nation as “fratricidal,” divisive within and therefore open to manipulation from without. In haphazard fashion, through the late 1960s and 1970s, my subjects (as well as others) came to constitute a self-designated moral opposition to the Tito regime. Typically, these oppositionists insisted that Titoism was responsible for the degradation, humiliation, division, and weakness of the Serbian people and emphasized the need for a Serbian revival. They viewed it as their task to reconnect the Serbian people with the “truth” of their past, their current situation, and to convince Serbs of the need for a national revival.

Each nonconformist contributed uniquely to the Serbian revival of the 1960s to 1980s. In some cases, they produced virtual monuments to that revival. Ćosić paved the way with his public rejection of the League of Communists’ policies in Kosovo in May 1968; Popović’s “Scenes Painting,” a cycle he first exhibited in 1971, portrayed critically the lives of ordinary Yugoslavs and arguably culminated with “May 1, 1985,” which depicted the fictional martyrdom of a Serbian peasant by Albanians and the Titoist regime in Kosovo; Mihailo Djurić’s public criticisms of the amendments to the Yugoslav constitution in 1971 became a cause célèbre of the free speech movement in Serbia thereafter; linguist Pavle Ivić first came to public notice in 1967 with his aggressive rejection of Croatian nationalist language politics and later acted as a vocal advocate of Serbian interests; Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz was one of the co-founders of the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom in 1982. Individually and collectively, these figures provide a remarkable prism through which to view the consolidation of a Serbian revivalist nationalism in the post-war period.

I originally intended this book to fully outline the contours of the intellectual life of post-war Serbia, in order to draw conclusions about the role that intellectuals played in the development of nationalism in Serbia. I wished to describe how Serbia's intellectuals had contributed to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the horrors of the wars of 1991–1999. Embedded in those summary statements are some assumptions that have been regularly accepted by observers of Serbia and Yugoslavia: that Serbian nationalism destroyed Yugoslavia, that Serbia's intellectuals bear the majority of the blame for the development of that nationalism, that Serbian nationalism is built on an old and perhaps ineradicable foundation, and thus that there was something inevitable about Serbia becoming aggressively nationalistic and warlike. I questioned none of those assumptions in the beginning, and still believe that the first two are valid with qualifications. As my work progressed, though, I realized that the idea that there was something inevitable about Serbia's fate was nothing more than a ticket to a vapid interpretation of Serbia's postwar history.

Luckily, in 1996, as I was doing research on this project in Belgrade, a Serbian friend loaned me a book. It was an original catalog from a banned 1974 exhibition of the Serbian painter Mića Popović, with text by the Serbian novelist Dobrica Ćosić. Ćosić was bound to be a central figure in any study of Serbian intellectuals and nationalism, so I knew of him and had spent much time reading his essays and novels already. I barely knew of Popović at that point, although I had seen and disliked his painting "May 1, 1985." Ćosić's catalog notes described a group of young men who gathered after the Second World War in a Belgrade flat (on Simina Street, 9a), a group of "nonconformists" (*neistomišljenici*) who lived a bohemian existence while debating the important questions of the time and who happened to become some of Serbia's most influential intellectuals and cultural figures. Ćosić strongly implied that the postwar interaction of the young men explained the success of the mature adults. Furthermore, that group of young men had by 1974 become consistent and often sophisticated nationalist opponents of the Tito regime in Yugoslavia. My landlord showed the catalog to me because he thought it illuminated the Serbian condition: the inhabitants of Simina 9a (*siminovci*) had led Serbia to the light of democratic thought and action, they had returned to Serbia its soul. While I was, and remain, unable to accept such a char-

acterization, I did like the bare facts. I also found myself liking Mihiz and Popović and their work, which gave me a nice respite from the dominant (and for me unlikable) Ćosić and most of the rest of the Serbian intelligentsia.

To varying degrees, and with one important exception, previous work on Serbia after 1945 reflects the tendencies I outlined above, and it follows similar patterns: Milošević used ancient images to gain and keep power; ancient loyalties determined modern grievances; and so on. But is it enough to state that Milošević built his authority with the assistance of Serbian intellectuals who were nationalists, or is it perhaps more important to know why Milošević could be sure that the nationalism of those intellectuals resonated with the Serbian population? Do comparisons of the grievances of Serbs, Albanians, Croats, et al., help illuminate anything, or is the better question how did Yugoslavs respond to such grievances? Which factors conditioned those responses? How were those responses expressed? In other words, what was the nature of the nationalisms that emerged? That they responded differently goes without saying. As I read more about and by Ćosić, Mihiz, and Popović, I concluded—against my initial inclinations—that Serbia’s modern nationalism could actually be *understood* and not just taken for granted but beyond the grasp of reason.

In approaching this topic, I have tried to employ Tony Judt’s approach: “In seeking to explain something that is intrinsically unattractive, to which the reader would normally respond with distaste, one is not excused from the obligation to be accurate, but neither is one under a compelling obligation to pretend to neutrality.”<sup>3</sup> I will try to be a fair-minded guide to readers of this book. I will attempt to bring as much balance to this exposition as the material will bear. However, I am not capable of the sort of empathy that would produce a completely positive assessment of my subjects and their work, because I do not believe that a positive assessment is deserved. In the 1980s, all three of my subjects participated in the creation of one of the most intolerant and narcissistic national movements that I know of. They did not carry guns, only one of them manned a soapbox as a tribune of the nation, but they did propagate ideas which helped create a modern Serbian national identity, an identity that most Serbs embraced, and an identity that helped lead Serbia to ruin.



I have been working on this book for over a decade, and I have accumulated many debts. For their support, I thank Michael Blankenship, Peter Buhler, Henry Cooper, John Cox, Murlin Croucher, Charles Jelavich, Carol Lilly, Peter Mentzel, Jane Ollenberger, Paul Pajić, Momčilo Pavlović, Pedja Marković, Ljiljana Smajlović, Djordje Terzin and his lovely family, Adele Thomsen, Vladimir Tismaneanu, and Driek Zirinsky. Among those people, I gratefully single out Vladimir Tismaneanu, whose personal and professional support really did make this book possible. I can't thank him enough. This book would not exist without their help, whether personal or professional. I also owe gratitude to several institutions. In Belgrade, the staffs of the Archive of Yugoslavia, the National Library of Serbia, and the Institute for Contemporary History made research a breeze. Indiana University's main library was heaven sent. The International Research and Exchanges Board, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Boise State University Office of Research Administration all provided financial assistance without which I could not have accomplished the necessary research. In addition, I would like to thank the following journals for allowing me to use portions of my articles on this subject: *Slavic Review* (published by the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies) for "The Nonconformists: Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović Envision Serbia," 58:3 (Fall 1999) 515–36; *East European Politics and Societies* for "The Children of Cain: Dobrica Ćosić's Serbia" (Summer 2000), 268–87; *Nationalities Papers* for "Mihiz in the Sixties: Politics and Drama Between Nationalism and Authoritarianism" v. 30 no. 4 (December, 2002), 327–51; and *Contemporary European History* for "Postwar Serbian Nationalism and the Limits of Invention," v. 13, no. 2, 2004, 151–69. Finally, I have never regretted putting my manuscript into the hands of Linda Kunos of the Central European University Press. She has been professional, attentive, thoughtful, and competent to a fault. I thank her and the staff of the press for their excellent work.

I have dedicated this book to Lynn and Nicky Lubamersky, because they are a *lot* more fun than a silly bunch of self-important Serbian intellectuals.

## NOTES

- 1 Prominent examples of this tendency include virtually all of the noteworthy books on Yugoslavia's collapse: Jasna Dragović Soso, *'Saviours of the Nation': Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1995); Sabrina P. Ramet, *Balkan Babel and Nationalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, several editions) and *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962–1991* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Lenard Cohen, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995). Eric Gordy's *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) does examine cultural phenomena, but in a completely different way than I do, and Andrew Wachtel, in *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), does so as well, but he treats the question much more broadly.
- 2 Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Branimir Anzulović's *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) is another book that relies on a heavy-handed rendering of the connections between Serbia's distant past and its present.
- 3 Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) 8.

## CHAPTER 1

# Simina 9a in a New Yugoslavia

Svetlana Velmar-Janković has written a story about a short street in the center of Belgrade called “Sima Street” (*Simina ulica*).<sup>1</sup> It was named for Sima Nešić, a Serbian policeman whose attempts to pacify Serbs and Turks in a famous confrontation in 1862 resulted in his own death at the hands of the Turkish army brigade in Belgrade. For Velmar-Janković, Sima the *targoman* (interpreter), who knew many languages and saw himself as a mediator between two hostile extremes, stands as a symbol of reconciliation lost among hostile and incomprehending voices. Velmar-Janković’s Sima Nešić believed that “much evil stemmed from the fact that people were unaccustomed to listening to or understanding each other—they simply did not pay attention to words.”<sup>2</sup> She finds it compelling that both Milan Bogdanović, an eloquent Marxist writer, and Slobodan Jovanović, Serbia’s renowned liberal historian, lived on Sima Street. Velmar-Janković does not mention that after the liberation of Belgrade in October 1944, a flat on Sima Street became the gathering point for a group of young Serbs of various personal, political, and intellectual leanings, yet joined in the belief that ideas mattered, even in a time of ideological orthodoxy such as the postwar period of communist consolidation. Time would tell that these men would eventually lose their ear for competing ideas; Velmar-Janković missed a golden opportunity to reflect on how a *targoman* can become deaf to the words of others. This book will consider the fates and influence of three men who began their adult lives as *targomen* in the most complicated of situations—a communist revolution—but ended up conformists in just as complicated conditions, as communism collapsed in Yugoslavia in the 1980s.

The communist revolution in Yugoslavia was felt and understood differently in various parts of the country, for obvious reasons. Yugoslavia

had disintegrated in 1941, and the parts went in disparate directions. In Serbia, a quisling regime was established; Bosnia and Croatia constituted the Independent State of Croatia, a fascist state whose leadership attempted to kill all of its Jews and Gypsies and kill, convert, or expel all of its Serbs; Macedonia became part of Bulgaria, Slovenia was split between Italy and Germany. Territorially, parts of Serbia (as defined by most Serbs) went to Italian-occupied Albania (Kosovo), Italy (part of Montenegro), Hungary (western Vojvodina), Bulgaria (Macedonia), and the Independent State of Croatia (Serb-populated regions of Croatia and Bosnia). Politically, the destruction of Yugoslavia in April 1941 left Serbian loyalists to the government-in-exile who were loosely gathered under the leadership of former Royal Army Colonel Dragoljub (Draža) Mihailović and known as “Četniks”; members of the fascist paramilitary group “Zbor,” led by Dimitrije Ljotić; those loyal to the quisling government of General Milan Nedić; those who fought with Tito’s communist Partisans; and those who chose not to choose sides. In terms of loyalties and territory, Serbia was the most fractured of all the Yugoslav regions by the war.<sup>3</sup>

Belgrade, the capital of Serbia and of interwar Yugoslavia, was liberated from the Germans and from the Nedić government by the Soviet Red Army and the communist Partisans of Josip Broz Tito between October 14 and 20, 1944. Liberation produced different emotions, depending upon one’s politics and attitudes towards the war. Although those emotions ran the gamut, several interesting models emerge from memoir literature of the period. There were, for starters, communist true-believers. Dobrica Ćosić, one of the primary subjects of this book, a conquering Partisan, described his own feelings:

In the October twilight of 1944, in a Russian truck with the Committee, escorts, and couriers, I came to Belgrade for the first time. We were all in English uniforms, with Russian machine guns. That was the first dusk in liberated Belgrade and the first night of freedom in which the stars were the only light. Liberty was proclaimed with the thundering of Russian katyushas on the banks of the Sava and the Danube at the Germans, who, defeated, withdrew towards their German homeland. The liberation of Belgrade was celebrated with a Partisan kolo on Slavija...<sup>4</sup>

The communist victors saw the deliverance of Yugoslavia's capital city as the beginning of a new era. Ćosić exulted: "It seemed to us that the world began with our freedom, that the world first appeared with our suffering and our fighting. Everyone believed that we would quickly put things in order around the country, that soon everyone would be happy..."<sup>5</sup> The celebrations on Slavija square exhilarated Ćosić, who stayed with his comrades in "the home of wealthy bourgeois collaborators with the occupier... feeling it was our class and national right."<sup>6</sup> Ćosić was overwhelmed: "The realization that I was a witness and a participant in the greatest collective happiness of Belgrade provoked in me the need to commit to memory all that happened on Slavija that night..."<sup>7</sup> The feelings of others were far from the minds of the Partisans who set out to recreate a unified Yugoslavia in their image.

Those others faced the new era with fear or resignation. As a young Četnik named Dimitrije Djordjević (later a well-known historian) passed through the streets of the city that October, "...shadows flitted by like ghosts. They surfaced from the nether depths of the city sensing that their time was coming."<sup>8</sup> Those shadows were portents of a chaotic and violent period in Belgrade at the hands of Ćosić's Partisans. One of Djordjević's painful memories of that time was the November execution by the Partisans of over a hundred residents of the city, a group that included actors, writers, members of various institutions that had continued to work under occupation, and his uncle, a painter. "There was little in common among them, except perhaps that none was a war criminal..."<sup>9</sup> As for his uncle, his atelier was taken over by a painter, Djordje Andrejević-Kun, who was a Partisan.<sup>10</sup> Of course, Djordjević, the scion of an influential middle-class family and a Četnik, could not be expected to sympathize with brutal and capricious violence in the name of a new order.

Still others fudged principle for survival. There were many who found it expedient to touch up their credentials with the new regime. For example, in November 1944, several articles appeared in *Politika* under the authorship of Marko Ristić, a well-known Serbian surrealist writer who had spent the war in Vrnjačka banja, a spa town in central Serbia. The first of these articles demanded that those who had spent the war "on this side of the front" compose an "inventory of shame," since they had "seen from close up treachery and horror, lies and crimes

without precedent.”<sup>11</sup> Ristić continued: “The traitor who is not eliminated is the breeding ground of future treachery, and the unpunished criminal is the stimulus to future crime. There is not and cannot be a free people, nor unity, nor peace, nor happiness without the complete, merciless destruction of the treasonous reaction...”<sup>12</sup>

A few weeks after his call to compose the inventory of shame, Ristić exulted in the deaths of “traitors,” in a piece entitled “Those Who Together Became Criminals Have Together Gone Off To Their Deaths.” Here he offered a jubilant requiem for those who had been among the first victims of the new regime, those same men lamented by Djordjević:

Those who became criminals together have gone off to their deaths together: Nedić’s ministers and agents of the special police, district heads and informers, members of the court martial of the Serbian state guard, Pećanac’s Četniks, generals and agents of the Gestapo, university professors and gendarmes, holders of the Karadjordjević star and Draža’s cutthroats...”<sup>13</sup>

There was a euphoric and almost bloodthirsty quality to the articles by Ristić, who had engaged in contentious literary polemics before the war with several of the leading Yugoslav communists. And as a bystander in the war, he knew that he needed to polish his resume. Marko Ristić became communist Yugoslavia’s first ambassador to France in the spring of 1945.

Whatever Ristić’s personal and professional qualities, he successfully navigated a tortuous period in Serbia’s history—the liberation of Belgrade and the establishment of communist power in Serbia. Djordjević also made it, with his dignity intact but little else. Having fought the Germans during the war, he survived capture and imprisonment in Mauthausen. Then, following Belgrade’s liberation, in November he successfully evaded forced conscription into Tito’s partisans and with it the notorious Srem front (established north and west of Belgrade after that city’s liberation), on which much of the fighting against retreating German divisions was done by untested conscripts from formerly-occupied Belgrade.<sup>14</sup> In November 1945, he was tried and imprisoned for a short time for opposing the communist regime via his small liberal-democratic organization called the National Revolutionary Serbian Youth. What separated the fates of Ristić and Djordjević was the will-

ingness of Ristić to reduce himself before the conquering communists and the insistence of Djordjević on retaining his personal and intellectual integrity.

Most of those living in Belgrade were less engaged than Ćosić, Djordjević, or Ristić. “Ordinary” Serbs probably felt as Bata Mihailović, a young painter, did upon liberation:

I did not seek an explanation whether communism won or this or that, that did not even occur to me. I was happy that someone who came into our house uninvited, who slaughtered, hanged, killed even children, who humiliated us, in the end had to flee like the last beggar and good-for-nothing... That is how I experienced it.<sup>15</sup>

Like other Serbs in liberated Belgrade, Mihailović had to find his way, burdened by a suspect wartime resume. The uncommitted cautiously navigated the period: Milovan Đanojlić described late 1944 and 1945 in military terms as “Operation Instill Fear.”<sup>16</sup> Miodrag Pavlović, a young Serbian poet, later explained that one could avoid attention

by an internal effort [to] make himself first ‘grey’ and then unnoticeable. Not to radiate anything, not to have a personality, nor breath, nor beating heart, nor fear, nor bravery. The police patrol [would] simply pass him by, not even asking for his military identification. He succeeded... unnoticed, invisible...<sup>17</sup>

Many probably felt as Đanojlić later reported that he had: “My whole life, I have felt a mixture of attraction and repulsion, interest and disgust, pleasurable mistrust and curiosity, towards the order established in 1945.”<sup>18</sup>

Serbs like these neither believed, collaborated, nor heroically defended their intellectual and personal integrity. Some of them fought their battle against the new regime by taking tiny steps. Still others reluctantly but passively accepted the good that came with the bad of the new order.

Several young men reflecting many of the various responses to the communist takeover gathered after the war in an apartment first described by Dobrica Ćosić in 1974. The address of these “nonconformists”<sup>19</sup> was Simina 9a (they are often referred to as *siminovci*, after the

street name). Since the mid-1980s, thanks to their own influence, that address has held a unique relevance for Serbian opponents of Titoism. Collectively, the *siminovci* view themselves as having been an important intellectual and cultural circle, although it is not entirely certain whether these nonconformists are significant for what they did from the late 1940s onward or for the image that they created for themselves and which resonated among other Serbs many years later.<sup>20</sup> In 1945, the nonconformists had a remarkable future ahead of them: Dobrica Ćosić became one of Serbia's foremost novelists; Miodrag (Mića) Popović one of Serbia's most influential painters; Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz an extraordinarily popular literary critic in the 1950s, an innovative theater director in the 1960s; Pavle Ivić a renowned and often controversial linguist; Mihailo Djurić, a combative philosopher; Živorad Stojković a publicist who contributed to the opening of Serbian publishing to once-blacklisted writers like Slobodan Jovanović; Vojislav Djurić a leading art historian.<sup>21</sup> There were also women, but their role has never been explained. Looking back in 1987, Ćosić wrote that previously he did not emphasize them because

of the desire not to remind our intelligent, pretty, and honorable female friends—Spomenka Mirilović, who read Yesenin to us in Russian, Jovanka Maksimović, Mira Margan, Vera Pavlović-Medar, Mileva Ivić, Mira Ilijević, Milica Mihajlović, Jelica Tomašević and some that I have forgotten—today notable and somewhat fatigued women, of our ever so male pigsty.<sup>22</sup>

He could have added Vera Božičković (who would marry Mića Popović in 1949), Kosara Bokšan, and Ljubinka Jovanović, all painters. Milka Ivić became a prominent linguist and was the wife of Pavle Ivić, while Milica Mihajlović was married to Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz.

But these nonconformists achieved their special place in the iconography of Serbian anti-Titoism because by the 1980s they all found themselves as nationalist opponents of the Yugoslav communist regime. Only when Ćosić became the voice of the Serbian minority in Kosovo after 1968, when Mihailo Djurić was martyred to the Titoist mantra of “moral-political fitness” (*moralno-politička podobnost*) in 1971, when Popović's 1974 exhibition was shut down for being too critical of the regime, and when Mihiz emerged as a voice for freedom of speech in



the 1980s, did they become relevant as a group. As the legend of Simina 9a grew in the 1980s, they themselves were prone to enhance their own roles and reputations in earlier times. Perhaps the clearest declaration about the importance of Simina 9a came from Mića Popović: “it bore the most serious values of our generation!”<sup>23</sup> One can find similar if less explicit claims by members of the circle, and nearly all of them emanate from the turbulent 1980s. One can also persuasively argue that by the 1980s, they had become narrow-minded nationalists, and that they had thereby betrayed the example of Sima the targoman and the promise of the street that nurtured them as young men.

The first occupants of Simina 9a were Borislav Mihajlović (later known by his nickname “Mihiz”) and Vojislav Djurić. They had met in Pančevo, where Djurić was a district police commander and Mihajlović was serving the new regime on the “Commission of Inquiry for the Confirmation of the Crimes of the Occupier and His Helpers in Vojvodina, District of South Banat.”<sup>24</sup> Djurić was a full member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, CPY), while Mihajlović was a *skojevac* (member of the communist youth organization) and a candidate for full party membership. Unable to bear the discipline, Mihajlović quit the party, and he and Djurić moved to Belgrade to begin university studies. They rented a flat on the third floor of Simina 9a, with Djurić’s stipend paying their rent.<sup>25</sup> Živorad (Žika) Stojković and Dejan Medaković were the next to join them. They were both friends of Mihiz from his high school days in Sremski Karlovci, and Medaković had spent many days and nights in occupied Belgrade with Stojković’s parents, whose apartment in Čubura was “a real oasis of freedom in occupied Belgrade.”<sup>26</sup> Stojković would never be as public a figure as the others eventually were, but Ćosić viewed him as the most honorable of them all, a proud and hard-headed moralist who would go for years not speaking to one or the other of his friends should they slight him (“only proud people—like Žika Stojković—turn down care packages,” Ćosić wrote in May 1951, as American aid poured into the country<sup>27</sup>). Medaković, a member of an influential Zagreb Serbian family, was described as the only true “decadent” of the whole bunch.<sup>28</sup> He had been employed in the Museum of Prince Paul (now the National Museum) since March 1942.<sup>29</sup>

The next addition to the circle was a young painter named Mića Popović, who had travelled back to Belgrade after serving time in battle

on the Drina front, in a military hospital, and in prison. He was invited in by Stojković, whom he had met in a prison hospital. Then, in early January 1946, the Ivo Lola Ribar Cultural-Artistic Society (a communist youth section named for a KPJ youth leader killed during the war), of which Mihiz was an officer, held a public reading.<sup>30</sup> The editor of *Mladi borac*, the newspaper of the communist youth of Serbia, arrived with a retinue to read a short story entitled “Canina’s First Love.” The reader already had a name—as a member of Serbia’s Agitprop commission, as the editor of a regime newspaper—and thus a ready-made reputation in the new order. He “read suggestively, with a poise which seemed meaningful, but did not call one’s attention to the actual text. Some of us failed to follow the content, because it somehow got lost in the reading, which lasted a fairly long time.”<sup>31</sup> Mihiz, the leader of the discussion, said that night that “the reading left a better impression than the story itself,” which “missed the mark as literature, cloaked by the ease and freshness of the narration.”<sup>32</sup> Mihiz was rewarded with derision from the more party-minded members of the audience. Following the evening’s festivities, Dobrica Ćosić, the stylish writer, approached Mihiz and suggested that they get to know each other better. Stojković and Popović were also present at the reading, and thus for the completion of the Simina 9a circle.<sup>33</sup> Mihiz recalled later that “Mića Popović and Dobrica Ćosić...came into my life in rather odd ways always to remain there, from entirely different extremes: one from the floor of a provincial military prison, the other from the very heights of the new government.”<sup>34</sup>

Their backgrounds were as diverse as their vocations would indicate. Mihiz was the son of an Orthodox priest. Born in Irig in 1922, he attended gymnasium in Sremski Karlovci amid the memories and mythology of Serbian history. “For instance, we learned all of *The Mountain Wreath* (Gorski vijenac) by heart. From the sixth to the eighth grade of gymnasium, one was automatically given the assignment to commit to memory, hour by hour, twenty lines... They taught us to be good Serbs.”<sup>35</sup> Medaković, Mihiz’s schoolmate, confirms that they had to memorize Njegoš, the object of a “true cult,” but the impression of Serbianness is mitigated by the fact that they learned Ivan Mažuranić’s “Death of Smail-Aga Čengić” as well.<sup>36</sup> Mihiz’s father was politically liberal, and chose to express his liberalism by voting for opposition candidates—whichever of Ljuba Davidović’s Democrats or

Jovan Jovanović's Agrarians seemed to be more honorable. He couldn't vote for Pribićević's Independent Democrats because they were too Croatian. Upon the liberation of Belgrade, Mihiz's childhood friend and then-Partisan Voja Korač sent him to Pančevo to work on the war crimes council, probably as an act of salvation to give Mihiz credentials with the new regime.

Popović was born in Loznica on June 12, 1923, but his parents moved the family to Belgrade when he was four. His father Toma was a veteran of the Salonika front in the First World War. Popović never showed much of an inclination to schoolwork, but his painting drew admirers even as an eighteen-year-old. He spent the war in occupied Serbia, working as a waiter in the Slavija hotel in Belgrade, then as forced labor in the mines of Bor; with the liberation of Belgrade in October 1944, he volunteered for military service. His commander placed him in the propaganda detachment of his unit, where he painted what he called "monster-portraits" (communist icons) for several months. In January 1945, he demanded that he be allowed to fight. His reasons for volunteering are unclear. Popović may have felt obliged to fight because his father spent the war incarcerated by the Germans. He may simply have felt guilty about having spent many of the war years in the relative safety of Belgrade. He was dispatched to the Drina, where he joined the party and was wounded near Gračanica, on the southern tip of the Srem Front; then to an army hospital, where he met its commander, Žika Stojković, who befriended him. From the hospital, Popović was consigned to Belgrade, where he helped paint the Soviet Army Center. There he first came into contact with the hierarchy of privileges that obtained in the new "egalitarian" order, as rations were dispersed according to rank. He complained about this in a letter to his friend Stojan Ćelić, but unfortunately the letter was intercepted by a member of OZNA, the new regime intelligence service, and Popović was arrested and kicked out of the party. After spending weeks in jail, he was given a six-year sentence, but was soon amnestied. In spring 1946, he made his way to Simina 9a, about which he had heard from his friend Stojković.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Dobrica Ćosić's was a family of peasants. Dobrosav Z. Ćosić was born in Velika Drenova on January 4, 1922.<sup>38</sup> After a youth spent working and playing in the fields of the Morava valley, in 1939 he stumbled upon some socialist literature while at school in Negotin.

Soon thereafter he joined the *Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*, the communist youth. The war brought a sense of clarity to his life: “now we communists would begin our war.”<sup>39</sup> By the autumn of 1943, he was working for the district Agitprop sector. After writing articles for *Mladi borac* (Young Warrior), he was in the fall of 1944 co-opted for work in that newspaper’s editorial office; he also began to work at that time in the Agitprop commission for the Serbian communist youth. Freedom, though invigorating, left him unfulfilled: “liberation comes, and I scribble.”<sup>40</sup>

### THE DIALECTS OF CREATION AND DESTRUCTION

They came of age in trying times—there was probably never a more complicated moment in Yugoslavia’s twentieth-century history. Immediately after the liberation of Belgrade, Aleksandar Ranković, a Serb among the leadership of Tito’s communists, described Serbia’s situation in stark terms:

...in difficult and unequal battle with a far more powerful enemy, our [Serbian] nation found itself in difficulties such as it had not known in its earlier struggles. Former political leaders, generals, and officers, state and local civil servants from the bureaucracy of old Yugoslavia not only did not stand on the side of the people, but they joined with their centuries-old enemy and became his loyal helpers and bloody criminals against their own nation. Thus in its hard struggle against the occupier the Serbian people had at the same time to suffer the struggle against traitors, who knifed it in the back in the most difficult years of its national history.<sup>41</sup>

Serbia’s situation had a specific reference point for good communists: in the Yugoslav party’s view, Serbia had acted hegemonically in interwar Yugoslavia; the Serbian bourgeoisie, military, government, and monarchy had acted as the gravediggers of the interwar state and the oppressors of the remaining nations of the state. Serbia thus came in for some very specific treatment after the liberation of Belgrade.

The first Serbian dilemma to be addressed was its geopolitical fate. At the first meeting of the “Great Antifascist Assembly of National Liberation of Serbia” in November 1944, Ranković had to convince fel-

low Serbs of the need to politically partition their Serbia, asking rhetorically whether one “could speak of the fragmentation of Serbian lands, the division of the Serbs and the weakening of Serbia.” One could, Ranković said, begin

from the standpoint that Serbian hegemony and the oppression of other peoples should continue to exist....But, if one begins from the standpoint of the equality of all of the peoples of Yugoslavia, the removal of all that which reactionaries could exploit and which they exploited for the estrangement of the peoples of Yugoslavia, if one begins from the standpoint of the unity of Yugoslavia as a brotherly association of equal nations, if one begins from the standpoint of the struggle against the Germans and their helpers...then there can be no talk of that.<sup>42</sup>

Serbia, a republic within the federation, would have two autonomous units: Vojvodina, a province, and Kosovo and Metohija, a region, of lesser status than Vojvodina. Other points of interest include the decision to add some territory historically belonging to Croatia to Vojvodina and to create republics of Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Macedonia, all of which could conceivably have been added to Serbia or partitioned between Serbia and some other federal unit.

As were Serbia's physical contours, the cultural and economic contours of Serbia under communism were also quickly established. Cultural policies for all of Yugoslavia were determined by a tightly knit circle of influential communists, with Milovan Djilas at the head. Djilas, one of the four leading Yugoslav communists during and after the war (with Tito, Ranković, and Edvard Kardelj), eagerly accepted the role of cultural arbiter and regime propagandist. In July 1945, the central committee of the KPJ formally established the Department for Agitation and Propaganda (“Agitprop”), which Djilas guided.<sup>43</sup> The main task at hand for Agitprop upon liberation of the country was as much to build a new communist cultural climate as to destroy the control, real or potential, enjoyed by competitors. Agitprop's activity was dominated by a core group of intellectuals whom Djilas described as “smart, well-indoctrinated, and steeped in ideology.”<sup>44</sup> Among them, Djilas, Stevan Mitrović (formally the secretary for KPJ Agitprop), and Radovan Zogović (the commissar for culture for KPJ Agitprop) stood

out—Djilas because he was one of the four acknowledged leaders of the party, Mitrović and especially Zogović for their Stalinist militance.<sup>45</sup> Zogović was the most visible and most uncompromising member of the Agitprop elite.<sup>46</sup>

A key problem faced by the regime was the lack of communist intellectuals. Reorienting the cultures of the peoples of Yugoslavia would require the commitment of the cultural elite of those peoples. So many of Yugoslavia's leading lights were either unwilling to work with the regime, compromised by wartime actions, or untutored in the Marxist-Leninist basics, that one of the chief tasks forced upon Agitprop was to create such a cadre from the ground up. Cultural figures thus occupied an important place in the new order. Here, the *siminovci* represented the type of cultural resources that the regime hoped to cultivate. It approached this problem on two fronts, one destructive, the other creative. While destroying the influence of old cultural institutions, it attempted to create new ones to nurture and then command the loyalty of a new cultural elite. The relationship of revolution and tradition would continue to vex Yugoslavs, communists and noncommunists alike. Here, the treatment of organizations (the Serbian Literary Guild [Srpska književna zadruga, SKZ]), people (Marko Ristić, Ivo Andrić), and works (*The Mountain Wreath*) will serve as examples of the way the party approached the cultural transformation of Serbia.

In Serbia, destructive force was first turned on the Serbian Literary Guild, which published the *Srpski književni glasnik* (Serbian Literary Herald), and was the oldest Serbian literary society.<sup>47</sup> The SKZ, never a source or sponsor of leftist ideas, continued to operate under Nedić during the Second World War, which rendered it suspect in the eyes of the communists at war's end. In April 1945, a commission of the Antifascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Serbia (*Antifašistička skupština narodnog oslobodjenja Srbije*, ASNOS) with Djuro Gavela, a Serbian literary historian, as commissar, produced a report condemning the work of the SKZ under the leadership of Svetislav Stefanović (who had already been executed, among that initial group of collaborators in November 1944). Gavela was in a tough spot, as he was closely associated with the prewar guild and wished as much to give it new life as to condemn its wartime collaboration. He imposed a heavy-handed solution on the SKZ: banished for life from the organization were several compromised members of the wartime directorate; any writer whose work had been

published under the collaborationist directorate (a category that included William Shakespeare and the turn-of-the-century Serbian scholar Stojan Novaković); and those writers who had submitted manuscripts during the war, even if they were not published.<sup>48</sup> The entire series of wartime publications was destroyed, their memory erased from the record. Thus *The Merchant of Venice* was pulped in Belgrade in 1945.<sup>49</sup> This doctrinaire solution saved the SKZ, but in fact the institution remained marked by its traditionalist inheritance and, with one short exception, never came close to regaining its prewar importance.

Instead, a new organization was created alongside it, an organization free of the SKZ's mark of shame: the Serbian Writers' Association (*Udruženje književnika Srbije*, UKS), a component of the larger League of Writers of Yugoslavia (*Savez književnika Jugoslavije*, SkJ). The Serbian Writers' Association was founded on December 31, 1944 at a meeting in the main hall of the tainted premises of the Serbian Literary Guild. Several months later, sections for Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija were founded.<sup>50</sup> As "antifascist writers who are in sympathy with the inheritance of the people's liberation war," the writers who answered the call to form the association elected Isidora Sekulić president, Jovan Popović (a socialist-realist poet) vice-president, and Oskar Davičo (one of Belgrade's surrealists) first secretary. The other officers included Zogović, Ivo Andrić (a bourgeois novelist on the brink of his most impressive literary contributions), Ristić, and Gavela. The organization counted forty founding members; of sixty additional applicants, forty-one more were accepted, which brought the total to eighty-one.<sup>51</sup> The "court of honor" of the UKS (which included Ristić, Gavela, Eli Finci, and Milan Dedinac) rejected nineteen applicants, having deemed them too compromised by their wartime activities.

The intellectual inheritance of the leaders of the KPJ and the dictates of party policy combined to make socialist realism the victorious dogma of immediate postwar Yugoslavian cultural politics. Socialist realism has been defined by one of its adherents as "the true and full depiction of reality in its revolutionary development" (Andrei Zhdanov). According to a hostile Predrag Palavestra, one of Serbia's foremost literary critics since the early 1950s, the ideologues of a "vulgarized" socialist realism in Yugoslavia enjoyed "absolute and supreme authority, which was expressed apodictically and irreversibly."<sup>52</sup> In Yugoslavia, the socialist-realist period did not last long—the doctrine was discred-

ited along with Stalinism not long after the 1948 Tito–Stalin split. Its dictates alienated many Yugoslav writers, because it demanded that the deeper traditions, historical continuities, and organic developments of the national literatures be subordinated to its didactic task. In spite of these obstacles, in Yugoslavia the new regime at least tried to apply it vigorously. But even before 1948, its application was not pervasive.

The regime could not sustain a solid break with the past because there were not enough Yugoslav socialist realists. So, for instance, at the First Congress of Writers, Zogović provided some insight into the way that prewar writers who were not leftists could make it into the fold. He explained that prewar Yugoslav writers were divided mainly between two extremes: profascist and antifascist. There was still a middle ground, however.

Among those writers for whom it could be said that they were in the middle, certain older writers evinced special qualities; the best and healthiest traits of their poetry link them to the realistic and revolutionary-romantic literary tradition, to the national-liberation struggles of our peoples before the First World War, to certain groups within the National Front, to our folklore, etc.<sup>53</sup>

The government was prepared to include these non-communist writers in intellectual life in Yugoslavia. In special cases, such as that of Ivo Andrić, whose resolute refusal to work with the occupation authorities in Belgrade overcame his prewar status as a member of the establishment (he had been ambassador to Germany when Yugoslavia signed the Tripartite Pact in 1941), the need to co-opt leading figures for the revolution overcame a natural reluctance. Notable examples of the co-opted also included Aleksandar Belić, the Serbian linguist.

The party, through Agitprop, which utilized the writers' organizations and journals as means of transmission to the broader public, defined the task of the writer. Formally, that task was closely linked to the dominant conception of the role of art and literature in the revolution: *partijnost* (party-mindedness). One recent formulation of *partijnost* (in the Soviet context) describes it as follows:

the artwork's dominant idea had to be "communist." But while this was a *necessary* condition for an artwork's identification as "Soviet,"



it was far from *sufficient*: “Party-mindedness” meant not merely illustrative of some abstract (communist) idea, but also “militant,” “aggressive,” producing an active effect. An artwork was ‘Party-minded’ insofar as it contributed to “the construction of communism” or, in other words, insofar as it commented on the burning problems which confronted socialist society.<sup>54</sup>

The Yugoslav writer or artist was expected to produce works that evinced an active involvement in the social process, that not only represented but actively engaged in the transformation of society with communism as the ultimate aim. It went without saying that the work of art and the artist him/herself were expressing the will of the entire people rather than some self-interested segment. Such a series of definitions, although rigorously conceived, left the door open to writers who would not identify, strictly speaking, with communism. For instance, Andrić, perhaps the best example of a non-communist writer who was able to make himself at home under the new order, publicly defined the role of the writer in a way that allowed for the merging of the non-communist writer’s own ethos with *partijnost*: the writer is someone who

creates people or at least contributes to their creation...[not] one who willingly and consciously, through choice of theme or process, stands aside from the life of the living, far from either our reality or the world’s, who wants only to create through literature a deserted field and playground for his personal parades and battlegrounds, for bizarre games of the heart and the barren exploits of lonely thoughts.<sup>55</sup>

Without resorting to Stalinist boilerplate, Andrić had concurred with the standard Zogovićean definition of the engaged writer; but in so doing, he had also revealed how unrevolutionary the concept could be.

The literary critic also occupied a special place in communist Yugoslavia. If Yugoslavia lacked a developed cadre of Marxist writers, poets, painters, musicians, and other cultural actors, then it was incumbent not just on the party itself, through administrative measures and cadre education, but also on the critic to work towards the refinement of a socialist culture. Zogović had enunciated a role for criticism as early as 1946: “Criticism must follow that enormous mass of translated and

domestic books which are printed daily and which the new reader thirsts for.” The critic’s task was to “explain the idea of the book, to clearly and objectively assess its virtues and its defects, to place front and center the most meaningful literary works.” “Without criticism,” Zogović added, “the inexperienced reader in the multitude of books looks like a traveler in an unknown region without a guide; without criticism—a book in the hands of an inexperienced reader, in other words, our reader, remains half-mute.”<sup>56</sup> The victory of a new order demanded more, and less, of criticism than ever before. More, because a communist literary intelligentsia had to be developed, quickly; less, because the new order demanded a single critical approach, whereas earlier critical discourse in Serbia and Yugoslavia had been exceptionally competitive. Criticism, which usually involves the critique of a literary or artistic work after its creation, now became a didactic guide to the writer before the fact. In other words,

theory did not follow practice, criticism did not follow the completion of the work of art, but theory and criticism took over the role of guide in artistic life, bringing before artists demands which had to be fulfilled, and judging works of art and their scope on the basis of such a priori posited demands.<sup>57</sup>

Zogović’s critic, it goes without saying, would apply socialist realism to his subjects.

Given the fact that socialist realism was alien to most Yugoslav writers and artists, another of Agitprop’s tasks was to co-opt what it could of individual national literary inheritances. One famous example is Zogović’s reevaluation of Njegoš’s *The Mountain Wreath*. Zogović’s Njegoš was motivated less by religious and national oppression than the constraints of life under feudal Ottoman domination.<sup>58</sup> Such a stance required a reinterpretation of the social structure of Montenegro as well as of Njegos’s own motivations. “In Montenegro a tribal order of a special type governed in which there was already private ownership, and thus also a sort of embryo class division, but also tribal unity regarding one tribe’s relationship to another and especially toward foreign conquerors [i.e., Ottomans]...”<sup>59</sup> The embryonic class struggle thus brought Montenegrin tribes into conflict with the governing Turk.

Thus the annihilation of poturice [Slavic converts to Islam] in Montenegro, and the war of liberation which began before and continued after it, was in essence the germ of the wars of liberation of the Balkan peoples, the beginning of resistance to the foreign feudalists, to the Islamized domestic lords, to feudalism in general, to feudal tyranny and exploitation, to the arrogant game that the great powers played with the fate of the Balkan peoples.<sup>60</sup>

For Zogović, the classic centerpiece of *The Mountain Wreath*, the slaughter of converts, was merely the first act in a class struggle that brought them under the sword not for their religious or national attributes, but for their socio-economic position.

Zogović finds *The Mountain Wreath* to be “an eternal textbook for the revolutionary struggle for the freedom and happiness of the people... a living and unintended textbook for our National Liberation struggle.” For this assertion he cites the following lines of the poem:

Let there be ceaseless battle!  
Let there be the unthinkable,  
...  
let resound a song of horror,  
to build an altar on bloodied stone!

“That place [in the poem]...embodies the revolutionary truth that a new, proper social order, a kingdom of liberty, a new ‘altar’ on the land, can be built only on the wreckage of the old, can only be conquered through revolutionary struggle.”<sup>61</sup> Njegoš himself, usually portrayed as a romantic, becomes for Zogović “a powerful, fearless and just painter of the world, life, people, human society, and human passions—and his reflections are worth more as elements and forms of artistic truth about life than as some sort of pure philosophy.”<sup>62</sup> “Those are the reasons which make Njegoš’s realism unique. Some of them draw him very close to our understanding of new realism.”<sup>63</sup> Njegoš’s realism was nearer to new realism than to either our classical or modern critical realists.”<sup>64</sup> Zogović’s prescriptions conflict: on one hand, there will be ceaseless battle, an altar built on bloodied stone, and rebuilding on the ruins of the old; on the other, Njegoš himself stands as a co-opted symbol of that “old.”

Yugoslavia's artistic community found itself just as bound by the new faith as writers were. The regime, through its artistic organizations, juried exhibits, and sanctioned critics, who included Jovan Popović, Grga Gamulin, and Oto Bihalji Merin, aggressively promoted socialist realism in painting from 1944 to 1950. The artistic version of the UKS, the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (Udruženje likovnih umetnika Srbije, ULUS) was founded in 1944; in 1945, parallel organizations were formed for the other republics of Yugoslavia. In 1947, the Union of Fine Artists of Yugoslavia (Savez likovnih umetnika Jugoslavija, SLUJ) was created to coordinate the actions of the others. At the first congress of SLUJ in December 1947, the Serbian painter Djordje Andrejević-Kun (who had taken over the atelier of Dimitrije Djordjević's uncle in 1944) outlined the goal of the organization, that

art participate actively in that altering of life, in the creative transformation of man. But in giving expression to life which is changing, it will itself change....we need to develop among us the justified ambition to offer European and world art new examples for progressive art....but our first and main ambition is to satisfy the needs of our peoples for art, to answer the demands of our epoch.<sup>65</sup>

Developing that new art would be difficult, given Yugoslavia's and Serbia's artistic inheritance. There were no true socialist realist painters in Serbia in 1944. Impressionism, which came late to Serbia (between approximately 1907 and 1920, in the work of Nadežda Petrović, Mališa Glišić, Kosta Miličević, and others) became the *bête noir* of the new critical elite in Yugoslavia. Impressionism's heirs had also made inroads in Serbia. The new regime rejected them all. In the words of Oto Bihalji Merin, the art of the interwar period left

a clear picture of the sickness and weakness of capitalism. It did not create a harmonious style, nor even a unified character. It is chaotic, restless, and far from its true calling: to create not an artistic work, but [one] for humanity, and that in the great, convincing, and universally understandable language of formation.<sup>66</sup>

The socialist realist critics sought painting that reflected the unity of form, content, and the era in which it was produced:

life irresistably imposes the creation of art whose content will be a reflection, explanation, and document of our contemporary reality—its form accessible and easily understood by the average working man and people, the creation of idealistic art which will work educationally, uplifting the social political consciousness of the entire people, art which will be both nice and necessary to the people.<sup>67</sup>

This demand for coherence and engagement led them to promote the painters of the renaissance, the baroque, and the romantic eras. In Serbian painting, they reached for models beyond the impressionists to a slightly earlier period, when painters like Uroš Predić and Paja Jovanović produced their imposing testaments to romantic national revival. The goal of the proponents of socialist realism was not to turn painters into automatons who would replicate the work of old masters. Painters would, however, be called to replicate the synthesis of era and art that the ideologues of socialist realism believed those earlier periods reflected. Jovan Popović wrote in 1947 that “socialist idealism...must permeate the content and form of the work of art, it must be inseparable from the most intimate feelings and thoughts of the artist....thus work on ideological education is crucial.”<sup>68</sup> They sought to create a new yet authentic art for the proletariat of the new socialist society being created.

Its lofty goals aside, the new regime had to accept what it could find in Serbian art after 1944. There was one limited precedent in Serbian painting that lent itself to the new form. “Social painting” provided one potential breeding ground for socialist realism. The social painters of the 1930s had proclaimed their social conscience and chosen themes that they judged close to the people. They painted the lives of the impoverished and the backward and thus became weapons in the hands of the left. Many of them were close to the Communist Party and became Partisan painters during the war. But those were the exceptions. It is reasonable to imagine socialist realism as social art triumphant: the latter fighting the battle for equality and social justice, the former the victorious face of the new order. These painters included Djordje Andrejević Kun and Petar Lubarda, whom critics differentiate by noting that Kun became a true adherent of socialist realism while for Lubarda it was just a passing fancy.<sup>69</sup> Other established painters who

moved to socialist realism after the war were Marko Čelebonović, Milan Konjović, Nedeljko Gvozdenović, and Milo Milunović. But in spite of their commitment to socialism, the artistic roots of these painters were in prewar “bourgeois” art. Their shortcomings magnified the need for a truly new painter—one raised, trained, and produced fully within the socialist realist school.

Boža Ilić answered the regime’s prayers. Ilić, a Montenegrin who studied art during the war and was by 1947 a student of Milo Milunović, first exhibited his work in June 1947 at the Fourth ULUS Exhibition in Belgrade, reaching his peak in late 1948 with the painting *Sounding the Terrain In New Belgrade*. “While other painters,” reports one commentator, “were transformed on the double from the inheritance of past ‘decadent’ times, Boža was in class terms pure crystal ready to become the symbol of the new era.”<sup>70</sup> His rapid rise, facilitated by the overwhelming approbation of regime critics and ULUS juries, was matched by his precipitous fall after 1950, when socialist realism was eclipsed by a new order brought by the break with Stalinism. At the height of his popularity, Ilić was promoted by the state and thus resented by his peers. Miodrag Protić is critically compassionate towards Ilić, who, Protić asserts, “took part in the whole operation of planning and establishing the face of the ‘new artist’...allowing some of his personal characteristics to be brought into a plot that he could not fully control...” Others view him as utterly naive: “He had no idea what socialist realism was....He was saved by Russian films in which all of the Red Army soldiers usually live, and all Germans assuredly die.”<sup>71</sup> If Ilić was a somewhat ridiculous figure by the early fifties, he regained some respect later on. Part of the later attraction of Ilić’s work was the argument that he continued to paint “with an internal ardor, satisfying above all his need to paint, without regard for how much his post-socialist realist painting would be included in the problematic development of Serbian art of the past decades, if at all.”<sup>72</sup>

If Agitprop was charged with control of cultural affairs, the single most vitally important cultural question in the new Yugoslavia, the national question, received woefully little attention from the new regime. Now that we can look back in hindsight at Tito’s Yugoslavia, it is evident that communist policy regarding the national question had little but hope to drive it. Policy was purely administrative, while the idea of overcoming or replacing national identity was rooted in abstract

dreaming rather than design. What design there was focused on making each of the peoples of the new state more aware of and tolerant of other cultures and eliminating displays of nationalism from cultural dialogue. The figurative centerpiece of Titoist policy regarding national difference was the eventually hackneyed “brotherhood and unity,” which could mean anything and everything. Notably, the first scholarly discussion of communism’s approach to the national question in Yugoslavia focused almost entirely on administration, political history, and Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist theory and practice, with little comment on the nature of Titoist attempts to actually construct some new *cultural* identity to replace provincial or national identities.<sup>73</sup> An excellent recent study concludes that

throughout most of the 1950s, the authorities tried to make it appear that the centrifugal force of brotherhood and the centripetal force of unity were in equilibrium, but this balance was more apparent than real...even in the cultural sphere the expectation was that some kind of homogenization would eventually occur, even if it was not being forced and even if it did not require the elimination of the national cultures.<sup>74</sup>

One doubts that many of Yugoslavia’s communists believed in the true unity of the constituent peoples of the state<sup>75</sup>—instead, they believed that a historical process would eventually result in the conquest of national feeling by awareness of class interest. In other words, they had internalized the Marxist dogma. Thus Edvard Kardelj, the party ideologist, identified common ownership as the “new factor which creates a socialist community of a new type in which language and national culture become a secondary factor.”<sup>76</sup> At most, the Titoists believed that the eradication of economic difference and the crushing of nationalist demagoguery would render national identity irrelevant. At least, they hoped that a sense of mutual tolerance and understanding would develop in their Yugoslavia, a significantly less radical target. Policy, as such, wavered between these two goals—but a “Yugoslav” nation was not part of either orientation.

Serbs, as a rule, had higher, perhaps even revolutionary, hopes for a real cultural transformation under communism than any other people in Yugoslavia. They had persuasive reasons for this desire. In the inter-

war period, the Serbian ruling class showed an unfortunate tendency to treat non-Serbian territories and peoples (especially Macedonians, Albanians, and Croats) as conquered peoples or would-be Serbs. During the war, Serbs had suffered for their hubris, becoming victims of the vengefulness and anger of each of the other Yugoslav peoples. Additionally, Serbs in communist Yugoslavia were dispersed among all of the republics, with especially high concentrations in Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina; Montenegro, nationally Montenegrin in the Titoist taxonomy, was nonetheless considered by many Serbs and Montenegrins alike to be a Serbian territory; and many Serbs found it difficult to acquiesce in the existence of a Macedonian republic and nationality (a Titoist construction, but with slightly more distant historical roots). Furthermore, Vojvodina (an autonomous province) and Kosovo-Metohija ("Kosmet" for short until 1963, when it was raised from autonomous region status to become the autonomous province of Kosovo) were now separate-but-part-of Serbia, which further atomized the Serbian community. New cultural norms were expected by most Serbian intellectual and cultural figures to contribute to the safety of their communities outside of Serbia proper.

The question was complex—would "safety" demand the eradication of national cultures to be replaced by some supranational identity, or would it suffice to disseminate a spirit of tolerance? As one scholar rightly notes, brotherhood demanded only the latter, while unity implied the former.<sup>77</sup> The tension between the two goals informed much Serbian cultural debate in the 1950s, and then provoked conflict with the cultural establishments of the other republics from the 1960s onward. Two frames emerged from the war and the communist revolution in Yugoslavia. For non-Serbs and the party, Serbs were the bourgeois grave-diggers of Yugoslavia, nationalist-hegemonists, oppressors. For Serbs, Serbs were the primary victims of a violent and nationalistic ideology, Ustašism. Both were legitimate interpretations of the recent past, but they could not be brought into harmony with each other.

The Yugoslav cultural universe would change rapidly and precipitously during the first five postwar years. The socialist-realist regime might have settled in for the long haul except for one unanticipated event: in June 1948, the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) voted to expel Yugoslavia from its ranks. The Tito-Stalin split stimulated quick changes in the nature of communism in Yugoslavia and



out. For the international communist movement, the split provoked violent purges in each individual communist party, as “Titoist” heretics were sought out and imprisoned or executed. As Stalinist states attacked Titoism, so Yugoslavia’s leaders attacked Stalinism in their midst, arresting, incarcerating, and killing “cominformists” on the island of Goli Otok and elsewhere. Yugoslavia would enter a three-year period of grave danger, as Stalin and his allies tried economic and peer pressure to bring Tito and his leadership down. After a period in which it tried futilely to demonstrate its devotion to Stalinism, the KPJ resolved instead to legitimate itself by defining a unique path to socialism; it articulated what it believed was a true Marxism, in the form of workers’ self-management. Thereafter, Tito’s Yugoslavia would build its reputation as a maverick communist state, one in which the excesses of Stalinism were eliminated because a truer version of Marxism was being constructed. The pursuit of workers’ self-management would be the centerpiece of this authentic Marxism.

Abroad, the term Titoism would come to mean a more democratic communism, one in which personal freedoms were safeguarded, or at least more secure than in Stalinist Eastern Europe. Inside Yugoslavia, the revolution and its leaders became, relatively speaking and for the first time, popular. A broad view of the relationship of the party to culture after the split with Stalin would show that by 1954 a balance had been struck that allowed artistic freedom under the uncertain but relatively benign scrutiny of the party’s Agitprop commission. That balance took several years to develop, however. The Fifth Congress of the KPJ, which met in July 1948, was Stalinist, and there was yet no thought given to a new iteration of Marxism (but then only a month had passed since the expulsion of the Yugoslavs from the Cominform). By December 1949, two events indicated that the party hierarchy was considering loosening the reins on culture. First, Edvard Kardelj spoke at the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, where he attacked the Soviet norm by which “theoretical positions of the Soviet political leadership automatically become not only the only just ones, but also without discussion required for science the world around.” To counteract that situation, Kardelj said that “we believe that our scholars must be free in their creativity. Precisely because without the *borba mišljenja* [struggle of opinions] and without scholarly discussion...there is no progress in science nor is there successful struggle against reactionary

conceptions and dogmatism in science.”<sup>78</sup> The Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the KPJ, also held in December 1949, confirmed the new understanding and emphasized the end of “administrative” controls of cultural life.<sup>79</sup>

In spite of formal declarations of openness by party leaders, literary and artistic life in Yugoslavia would continue to be plagued by the fear of state interference. The ideological rethinking that began in 1949/50 forced a reconsideration of Stalinist methods, one of which was the administrative enforcement of socialist realism. The reconsideration provoked two responses in culture by 1952: one, labeled modernist, represented an attempt to establish an autonomous art and literature in the belief that a freely creative man was a natural component of the revolutionary transformation of society; the other, labeled realist, asserted that artistic freedom was critical to both the revolution and the creative act, but that above all art served the revolution. Each group believed that the other was politicized, and the party hierarchy remained convinced that both had hidden agendas (modernism = western decadence; realism = Stalinism). The modernists and realists were both children of the interwar “struggle on the literary left,” which pitted Miroslav Krleža and the Belgrade surrealists against the doctrinaire Stalinists of Djilas and Zogović. The modernists and realists alike were children of the Krleža faction, which stood against socialist realism, but the modernist approach was the more radical child.

In October 1952, the Third Congress of Writers met in Ljubljana, and in November 1952, the Sixth Congress of the KPJ met in Zagreb. Miroslav Krleža’s headlining and party approved speech to the writers’ congress attacked orthodoxy in culture and served finally to declare an end to the rigors of socialist realism.<sup>80</sup> At the Sixth Congress of the KPJ, Tito pronounced his support for the *borba mišljenja*. The *borba mišljenja* was at this point envisioned as something rather limited: in essence, party members would be encouraged to question and test the theoretical positions of other party members. Already at the Third Plenum of the KPJ in June 1951, the notion had been first considered as follows:

The development of new theoretical viewpoints in the KPJ will be accomplished on the basis of discussion and the struggle of ideas. On that foundation, members of the KPJ construct their theoretical views. Members of the KPJ have full right to freely express and dis-

cuss, whether verbally or in the party or other press, the theoretical views of individual members of the party, regardless of the function they fulfill, as also the viewpoints of theoreticians in general.<sup>81</sup>

Any theoretical contribution by a party member had to be read and discussed within party forums before it be made public. But the proclamation of the opening of the era of the *borba mišljenja*, accompanied by the renaming of the Communist Party of Jugoslavija as the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez komunista Jugoslavije, LCY) served to change the atmosphere of intellectual discourse. The era of socialist realism and party management might have ended, but it remained to be seen whether the overarching demands of *partijnost*—which were hardly questioned by the above characterization of the *borba mišljenja*—were also a thing of the past.

#### THE SIMINOVCI IN THE NEW YUGOSLAVIA

Simina 9a is described today as having been an original source of opposition to the Tito regime, a commune of sorts in which the free exchange of ideas was the only fixed principle. The siminovci had to work within the constraints of the new political and cultural constellation, which was challenging to say the least. With the exception of Čosić, they had yet to achieve any place inside or outside the new order. While their political and cultural values conflicted, the group *was* linked, as members of a distinctive generation. Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz explained:

Our generation was young, I dare say extremely young, although I am aware that each generation has the custom, the need, the reason, and the compulsion to think that it is exceptional. The arguments for the youthfulness of that generation are strong, to my mind, tragically strong. Whether we wanted to or not, we had to be young during three leap years: 1941, 1944, and 1948.... We saw death early, and it saw us early too, whether through the sights of a gun, the sheet-music pattern of the barbed wire of a prison camp, or beneath the non-Persian carpet of bombs. Astonished, we saw with the eyes of a child the death of one state, and many of us rightfully participated in the first birthday of another with the strange sensation of early fatherhood. Life poured into our quivering and

inexperienced hand a full glass, a glass full to the top with the hard liquor of all of [life's] extremes.<sup>82</sup>

Mihiz has described their variety, even as a "generation":

We young people of Simina 9a were of varying convictions, from a communism accepted along with the threat of death and wartime exploits, through compromising servility, spontaneous youthful anarchism, liberal democracy, sceptical and precocious conservatism, to open and cynical reaction, but we never kidded ourselves about the lasting nature and momentousness of change.<sup>83</sup>

Popović acknowledged that the "new power" was a problem for many of them: "the acceptance or misunderstanding of the newly established political situation was one perhaps complicated problem that we put off solving, but socialism as hope remained. That hope long stood on the horizon."<sup>84</sup> Popović described his own "youthful" leftism as "an impulse for justice, ...a constant preparedness for rebellion, the readiness to make one's contribution, the subordination of one's personal ambition..."<sup>85</sup> Whether they were enemies of the new order, true and hopeful socialists, or everything under the sun, the dynamism of their early years together was provided, Ćosić would later write, by "the fierceness of our disagreements regarding morals and ideas." Ćosić clearly served as the lightning rod. Popović: "Dobrica found in Simina 9a...people ready to call a spade a spade...we saw in Dobrica a person who, if he did not know the road to [socialism], knew it better than we did."<sup>86</sup> This is a picture of youth committed to a changed world, but who retained an ability to question the bombast of the new order.

Popović has characterized Simina 9a as a "house of heretics," while Ćosić reports that he periodically kept a record of their interaction under the title "People Without Compass."<sup>87</sup> These are two different metaphors: a heretic does not usually lack direction, and a wayward soul may very well end up a true believer. Ćosić spoke from his high position as a dedicated communist, Popović from the street, where nothing was obvious. It is clear from all the reminiscences that Ćosić really did stand alone even as he was part of the group. What for Ćosić were then ideological enemies were free-thinkers to Popović and Mihiz. Ćosić's explanation for their friendship: "Not even addicted individualists could

be alone, and neither could enemies of the new power be enemies on their own.”<sup>88</sup> But Ćosić’s characterization of the group as “enemies of the new power” was probably wrong. Popović, in any case, was far less categorical. For him, the young people of *Simina 9a* were “different, because they were of different origins, education, and eloquence, but all wished sincerely and with their entire being to find their place in socialism.”<sup>89</sup>

In the beginning, the *siminovci* were linked by little except their address, their friendship, and their nonconformism (with the exception of Ćosić, a true insider). Their starting points are illustrative: Ćosić filled a clearly defined role in the early years of communist Yugoslavia, whereas Mihiz and Popović struggled to find any role. Their insecurity became a fabled part of their public biography. Mihiz and Popović later proudly related early run-ins with Radovan Zogović, who still symbolizes the rigidity of the early Tito regime. The encounters were almost meaningless to Zogović. Popović faced him in the winter of 1944/45, when he was sent to Belgrade to take part in a seminar on painting in the new socialist state—he looked forward to it as a way of going to Serbia’s capital. Zogović delivered the main presentation, “very explicitly and directly describ[ing] how the new socialist painting should look in the new socialist era which had begun.”<sup>90</sup> Zogović intimidated the audience, which included some painters of repute, but when the moderator more or less begged for a response, only Popović stood. He asked why a poet was lecturing painters about art. Zogović responded “threateningly”: Do you having anything to add? To which Popović remembers saying,

I did, and said that his directives on how we should paint looked very simple: we should transfer, as is, from *Signal* (the magazine of the Third Reich) the solution of German war artists and merely change the hats—in place of the helmet with the swastika, we should put a cap with the five-pointed star!

His encounter with Zogović has been cited since as evidence that he was a warrior for Truth at this early date, but that attribution must be understood in the context in which it was offered, in the 1980s, when “truth” had become a rallying cry in opposition to Titoism, which by then had become the *bête noire* of the Serbian intelligentsia. In fact,

Popović himself recalled that he “had no concept of pragmatism at that time, so I reacted as I did.”<sup>91</sup> Not heroic, but naïve. Mihiz also claimed to have earned his stripes via a flare-up with Zogović. On one occasion, after signing up for classes at Belgrade University in 1945, Mihiz attended a poetry reading. Zogović read, while his prewar antagonist, Miroslav Krleža, sat in the audience. Mihiz relates the story in his memoirs with the benefit of hindsight, which undoubtedly sharpened the description: as Mihiz waited for Zogović to finish the reading in the overstuffed lecture hall in the Law Faculty, he paid closer attention to Krleža’s clapping hands than Zogović’s poetry. When the reader finished his recitation, Mihiz spoke first: “Why is Miroslav Krleža applauding the poetry of Radovan Zogović?...Does Radovan Zogović actually think that Miroslav Krleža has changed his considered opinion of his verses, or was he brought here by fear and sycophancy?”<sup>92</sup> (While Mihiz reports that Krleža slunk out of the room following his question, Zogović remembers immediately and supportively pronouncing Krleža “always in the front lines of our party, and he will stay there.”<sup>93</sup>) Like Popović, Mihiz condemned the hypocrisy that drove the new order, although spite probably drove him as much as the search for an honest communist.

Then, in 1946 and 1947, two pairs of *siminovci*, Mihiz and Vojislav Djurić, and Mića Popović and Petar Omčikus, decided to take part in “work actions”—the semi-mandatory postwar youth phenomena in which young communists would travel to a distant part of the country to work on a rebuilding project. A large part of the working day consisted of ideological education, as brigades were divided into small groups led by a trustworthy interpreter of the new dogma. Mihiz was already labeled an “anarcho-liberal” for his actions at the Zogović reading, but he had also tired of the cloistered climate of *Simina 9a* and wished to “act.” He wound up working with Djurić in the Brčko-Banovići youth brigade, from which he was quickly evicted thanks to his inability to conform. Mihiz’s education continued following his expulsion from the work brigade in 1946. Having accompanied Popović and several other young painters on a summer-long excursion to Zadar in 1947, where he himself painted a little (Popović remarked that Mihiz’s painting was “much more modern...amateurs, it seems, always dare to do more and go farther than professionals”<sup>94</sup>), he returned to Belgrade and published a book of poetry. Only one poem, entitled “In Which Direction,” has

lasted, if only thanks to the memory of Mihiz and those who have read his memoirs. Its theme was the sycophancy of Yugoslavia's cultural elite, and the damage that it did to more enduring values. Mihiz bemoaned the fact that under the new order Miloš Crnjanski must "steal away on tired legs," as "newcomers rip out and plant anew," while "drinking the wine of novelty." He also took shots at current favorites like Gustav Krklec and Desanka Maksimović. The poem ended with a plea for honesty:

A new song is sought  
but the old sincerity is desperately needed.  
The truth like a flag waving on high,  
and poetry on the battlefield.<sup>95</sup>

This poem precipitated Mihiz's final encounter with Zogović, which ended quietly when Milan Bogdanović convinced Zogović not to make too much fuss over such a small fry.<sup>96</sup> Mihiz continued his studies in Yugoslav literatures at the University of Belgrade, where he would graduate in 1949 with a thesis on the nineteenth-century Serbian poet Branko Radičević. He then found a paying job. Mića Popović's rise to prominence began with his outing to Zadar with several other young painters in the spring and early summer of 1947. The Zadar group has achieved a mythical status. The myth holds that the Zadar "communards" fled to the coast to escape oppressive socialist realism.<sup>97</sup> One critic asserts that "the firm aspiration of these young artists [was] to resist the educational program and other customs that then governed at school."<sup>98</sup> But, Popović says that the reason for their flight was simpler and less political—studying under Ivan Tabaković, there was a lack of space in the studio, in which were crammed students wishing to catch up on lost time. "We pressed each other, looked over each other's shoulders to see the model," said Popović. "And there were not enough models. We sketched plaster figures. Tabaković brought a skeleton to class."<sup>99</sup> Such was not unusual. One writer records that "used bookstores were constantly besieged by painters and lovers of painting, in the hope that some prewar owner would offer a book on art, whichever art, whatever sort of book; private connections were activated just so one could find these art books..."<sup>100</sup> The situation was so bad that Popović and Omčikus stole a painting of King Aleksandar from the Academy of Fine Arts. Popović painted "Belgrade" over the original and used half

of the proceeds of its sale, totalling 20,000 dinars, to fund the printing of Mihiz's first book of criticism, *Essays* (Ogledi).<sup>101</sup> Tabaković has also left testimony to modest deprivation, in his diary from 1945:

It's very hot....All stand, we do not have space for work, and it does not look like we will get it. I do not know how it will work in the fall....I visited Milunović. He complains that he does not have money for materials....I went to the Academy to get a small packet of paints, which Borislav Bogdanović sent from New York...<sup>102</sup>

With Tabaković's blessing, several members of his studio left for the coast, away from the restricted space of the Academy, which, like all Belgrade schools had an enormous influx of students after the war.

Popović and Bata Mihailović picked Zadar to serve as the scene of their commune, which included a number of highly talented women. They established themselves in Zadar in May 1947: Popović, Mihailović, Petar Omčikus, Mileta Andrejević, Vera Božičković (who would marry Popović in 1949), Kosara Bokšan, Ljubinka Jovanović, and the omnipresent Mihiz. The group worked freely, in nature, and made no attempt to follow the dictates of socialist realism. Trifunović has attributed to the Zadar group a definite aesthetic with two subversive elements: they saw 'nature as inspiration, and realism as the painter's relationship to it—the first was directed against artificial themes, the other against a politicized aesthetic,' the two main components of socialist realism.<sup>103</sup> The Zadar group maintained the continuity of Serbian painting "when the older generation in large part gave in to compromise, changed their thematics, and also began to alter their method of painting, thus preparing their artistic suicide."<sup>104</sup> Purposefully or not, the Zadar group lives in Serbian memory as the first successful attempt to break the shackles of regime-sponsored artistic norms. After four months in Zadar, the communards returned to Belgrade. Soon thereafter, with word of their intransigence having reached their teachers, the Academy of Fine Arts banished them. All but Popović were finally allowed to continue, but as the perceived ringleader of the group, he never was allowed to return. The Tito–Stalin split would eventually soften the regime's attitude towards such challenges as Popović's, but that transition was still two or three years off.



Whereas Mihiz and Popović occasionally annoyed people like Zogović, Dobrica Ćosić worked among them as a servant of the new order. He began modestly, a Partisan from day one, fighting during the war in his home region. He did not know who Tito was, except as an abstract authority in the party, until 1943. The nickname he chose in early 1943—Gedža—proclaimed his peasant origins: it is a pejorative term for peasant—"boor" or "hick"—and he would sign his articles with it and continue to be known by it in party circles. In spring 1943, he was the political commissar of his unit and a member of the Kruševac District Committee of the Communist Party of Serbia (Komunistička partija Srbije, KPS). By the fall, he had been appointed secretary of the District Commissariat for the Morava Valley. His first two written contributions to the cause came in 1943. One, in *Glas* (The Voice), the organ of the National Liberation Front of Serbia, dealt with the role of the Serbian youth in the revolution. The other concerned the murder of a young man by the Četniks; it was entitled "From the Empire of the Dagger," and published in *Mladi borac*, the newspaper that Ćosić would co-edit after April 1944. As of April 1945, he was assigned to the Agitprop commission for the Communist Youth, with Jovan Marjanović, whose fate and his would entwine again in changed circumstances twenty-three years later.<sup>105</sup> He continued to edit *Mladi borac* until 1948, when he moved to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Serbia, assigned to its Agitprop commission. He was also the people's representative for his home district of Trstenik after the war.

After the war, Ćosić threw himself into his work as a communist intellectual on several levels: in his literary work, as a party worker, and as a party ideologue. On the most fundamental level, as a member of Serbian Agitprop, Ćosić relates that he travelled constantly through Serbia, giving lectures on cultural renewal and monitoring the work of cultural institutions: publishers, book stores, theaters, museums, music associations, cinemas, and amateur groups of all sorts. His work focused on the construction of a network of local cultural organizations, the creation of a strong and well-indoctrinated core of communists in the villages, and giving direction to the type of cultural phenomena that were then acceptable. But in spite of all of his busywork for the party, it is clear from his own and others' reminiscences that Ćosić wanted to be a Writer, that this was an image that appealed to him.

The siminovci came of age in Yugoslavia as the communist revolution defined and then redefined the state, its cultures, its peoples, and its position in the world according to changing political realities in the communist bloc. In the 1950s, they would affirm themselves in their chosen fields, some more successfully than others. At all times, their successes and failures would be qualified by the prevailing ideological winds, as briefly elucidated in this chapter. Ćosić, Mihiz, and Popović worked in different fields, with different expectations of the new order and different conceptions of Serbia and Yugoslavia's place in the new postwar world. Through the 1950s, they would however continue to reward the promise of their namesake, Sima Nešić, as they cast about for defensible values in a world that was highly politicized. This is even true of Ćosić, the ultimate insider in Tito's Yugoslavia. Their search would send them to all corners of society and the world: from Serbian village to the most cosmopolitan city in the world, Paris.

## NOTES

- 1 Svetlana Velmar-Janković, "Sima Street," in Radmila J. Gorup and Nadežda Obradović, *The Prince of Fire: An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Short Stories* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998) 84–90. "Sima Street" was originally published as one chapter of Velmar-Janković's award-winning *Dorčol*.
- 2 Velmar-Janković, "Sima Street," 84–85.
- 3 Books in English that cover aspects of Serbian society during the war include Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975) and *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Walter R. Roberts, *Tito, Mihailović, and the Allies, 1941–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Wayne Vucinich, ed., *Contemporary Yugoslavia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969); Milovan Djilas, *Wartime* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); Dimitrije Djordjević, *Scars and Memory: Four Lives in One Lifetime* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1997).
- 4 Dobrica Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga/Alfa, 1997) 7–8. This account is semi-fictional.
- 5 Dobrica Ćosić, "Jedno prisećanje za 'Daleko je sunce,'" afterword to Dobrica Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966) 348.
- 6 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 9.
- 7 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 8.

- 8 Djordjević, *Scars and Memory*, 222.
- 9 Djordjević, *Scars and Memory*, 224.
- 10 Djordjević's uncle, Branko Popović, was described by the regime as: "University professor. Closest collaborator of Nedić's minister Jonić. Maintained close links with the notorious Bećarević, officer of the Special Police of the Administration of the City of Belgrade. To that Bećarević, he denounced a great number of free-thinking students in the city." "Saopštenje vojnog suda prvog korpusa NOVJ o sudjenju ratnim zločincima u Beogradu," in *Politika* (Belgrade) November 27, 1944, 1.
- 11 Marko Ristić, "Smrt fašizmu—sloboda narodu!" in *Politička književnost (za ovu Jugoslaviju) 1944–1958* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1958) 15.
- 12 Ristić, "Smrt fašizmu—sloboda narodu!" 15–16.
- 13 Marko Ristić, "Zajedno su pošli u smrt oni koji su zajedno pošli u zločin," in *Politička književnost*, 25.
- 14 On the Srem Front, see Branko Petranović, *Srbija u drugom svetskom ratu, 1939–1945* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992) 645–46.
- 15 Milo Gligorijević, "Dolazak boljih buntovnika" *NIN* (Belgrade) June 18, 1989, 30.
- 16 Milovan Danojlić, *Lične stvari: Ogledi o sebi i o drugima* (Belgrade: Plato, 2001) 17.
- 17 Miodrag Pavlović, *Drugi dolazak, ili Proslava smaka sveta* (Belgrade: Nolit, 2000) 28.
- 18 Danojlić, *Lične stvari*, 27.
- 19 For the term "nonconformists," see Slavoljub Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu: Razgovori sa Dobricom Ćosićem* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1989) 32. The catalog is part of Dobrica Ćosić, *Mića Popović, vreme, prijatelji* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1987). This volume includes the original essay included with the exhibition catalog from Popović's 1974 "Scenes" show. When that exhibit was banned, the catalog was banned with it.
- 20 Some of the inhabitants are alive, others deceased. Dobrica Ćosić, the most famous of them, is alive. Mića Popović, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Živorad Stojković, Pavle Ivić, Vojislav Djurić, and Antonije Isaković (who was not of the core group) have all died in the past several years. Living Siminovci include Dejan Medaković, Mihailo Djurić, Bata Mihailović, and Petar Omčikus.
- 21 Autobiographical writings include Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, *Autobiografija—o drugima* 2 v. (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1993–95); Dejan Medaković, *Efemeris: Hronika jedne porodice* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1992). Extensive interviews include Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, Milo Gligorijević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića* (Belgrade: Nezavisna izdanja, 1984); Miloš Jevtić, *Sa Mićom Popovićem* (Gornji Milanovac/Belgrade: Prosveta, 1994); and Miloš Jevtić, *Ishodišta Dejana Medakovića* (Belgrade: Partenon, 2000). They have written extensively about each other as well: Zoran Gavrić, et al., *Mića Popović* (London and

- New York: Alpine Fine Art Collection, Ltd.); Dobrica Ćosić, *Mića Popović*; Dejan Medaković, *Oči u oči* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1997); Mihiz, *Autobiografija*.
- 22 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 129.
  - 23 Jevtić, *Sa Mićom Popovićem*, 27.
  - 24 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 124.
  - 25 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 32.
  - 26 Medaković, *Oči u oči*, 16.
  - 27 Author's interview with Dobrica Ćosić, July 29, 2002; on care packages: Dobrica Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 2000) 20.
  - 28 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 34.
  - 29 Medaković, *Oči u oči*, 16.
  - 30 "Književno veće mladih," in *Mladost* (Belgrade) v. 3, no. 1–2 (January–February 1947) 131–32.
  - 31 Ž. Stojković, "Okolo prvog romana Dobrice Ćosića" in *Savremenik* (Belgrade) October 1984, 333.
  - 32 Stojković, "Okolo," 334.
  - 33 Mihiz, *Autobiografija* v. 1, 152–54; Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 25; Stojković, "Okolo," 333–34.
  - 34 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 151.
  - 35 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 71.
  - 36 Medaković, *Oči u oči*, 12.
  - 37 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 155–65.
  - 38 But Ćosić's grandfather Jeftimije determined that it should be recorded that he was actually born on December 29, 1921, to get the boy into and out of the military earlier. Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 13.
  - 39 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 346.
  - 40 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 348.
  - 41 *Deklaracije i odluke Velike antifašističke narodno-oslobodilačke skupštine Srbije* (Belgrade: Glas jedinstvenog NO Fronta Srbije, 1944) 9.
  - 42 Aleksandar Ranković, *Politički položaj Srbije i zadaci Velike antifašističke skupštine narodnog oslobodjenja* (Belgrade: Glas jedinstvenog NO fronta Srbije, 1944) 9.
  - 43 It was one of twelve departments established within the central committee; see Carol Lilly, *Power and Persuasion: Communist Agitation and Propaganda in Yugoslavia, 1944–1953* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2001), which is an excellent study of Agitprop in Yugoslavia, and the only one in English. See also "Odluka CK KPJ o organizacionim pitanjima," in Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, eds., *Jugoslavija, 1918–1984: Zbirka dokumenata* (Belgrade: Rad, 1985) 638. Ljubodrag Dimić, *Agitprop kultura: Agitpropovska faza kulturne politike u Srbiji, 1945–1952* (Belgrade: Rad, 1988) 36.
  - 44 Milovan Djilas, *Rise and Fall* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983) 9.

- 45 Zogović, for instance, published an article entitled "For Sword and For Pen" which exceeded Ristić's in its call for a reckoning with collaborationist writers. Radovan Zogović, "Za mač i za pero," which appeared in *Borba* on December 1, 1944, in Radovan Zogović, *Na poprištu* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1947) 109–13. The best brief English language discussion of this debate is Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 71–74.
- 46 As Carol Lilly has noted, Zogović's "invariably acrid and uncompromising statements were clearly at odds with the more moderate cultural line of the party as a whole..." Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, 65.
- 47 On the zadruga, see Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Istorija srpske književne zadruge* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1992).
- 48 The directorate included the already deceased Stefanović, plus Dragutin Kostić, Todor Manojlović, Jeremija Stanojević, Mladen St. Djuričić, Borivoje Jevtić, and Milan Terić.
- 49 Djura Gavella, *Srpska književna zadruga pod okupacijom* (Belgrade: Planeta, 1945) 45; Trgovčević, *Istorija*, 106–107.
- 50 "Poziv književnicima," in *Politika* (Belgrade) December 31, 1944, 7; "Osnovano je udruženje književnika u Beogradu," in *Politika* (Belgrade) January 1, 1945, 4.
- 51 The first membership list of the UKS only lists fifty-one. All of these figures come from Radovan Popović, *Pisci u službi naroda: Hronika književnog života u Srbiji, 1944–1975* (Belgrade: Politika, 1991) 12, 20–21.
- 52 Predrag Palavestra, *Posleratna srpska književnost, 1945–1970* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1972) 29. See also Stanko Lasić, *Sukob na književnoj levisi* (Zagreb: Liber, 1970) 49.
- 53 Radovan Zogović, "O našoj književnosti, njenom položaju i njenim zadacima danas," in Zogović, *Na poprištu*, 190.
- 54 Leonid Heller, "A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories," in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 53.
- 55 Ratko Peković, *Ni rat, ni mir: Panorama književnih polemika, 1945–65* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1986) 48–49.
- 56 Zogović, "O našoj književnosti, njenom položaju i njenim zadacima danas," 201–202.
- 57 Ješa Denegri, *Pedesete: Teme srpske umetnosti (1950–1960)* (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1993) 21.
- 58 Radovan Zogović, "Njegoševa poema o borbi i slobodi," in Zogović, *Na poprištu*, 247–70.
- 59 Zogović, "Njegoševa poema o borbi i slobodi," 249.
- 60 Zogović, "Njegoševa poema o borbi i slobodi," 250–51.
- 61 Zogović, "Njegoševa poema o borbi i slobodi," 261.
- 62 Zogović, "Njegoševa poema o borbi i slobodi," 262.

- 63 "New realism" was the term that the Yugoslavs used for "socialist realism."
- 64 Zogović, "Njegoševa poema o borbi i slobodi," 266.
- 65 Quoted by Dragoslav Djordjević, "Socijalistički realizam," in *1929–1950: Nadrealizam, socijalna umetnost*, Muzej savremene umetnosti (Belgrade) April–June 1969, 70.
- 66 Oto Bihalji Merin, writing in 1949, and quoted in Lazar Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo, 1900–1950* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1973) 251.
- 67 Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 252.
- 68 Jovan Popović, quoted in Trifunović, *Srpsko slikarstvo*, 253.
- 69 Denegri, *Pedesete*, 24.
- 70 Milomir Marić, *Deca komunizma* (Belgrade: Mladost, 1987) 229.
- 71 Marić, *Deca komunizma*, 230.
- 72 Denegri, *Pedesete*, 27.
- 73 Paul Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968)
- 74 Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 132.
- 75 The notion that the Yugoslav peoples were really in fact one was never in any way endorsed by the Yugoslav ideologists.
- 76 Shoup, *Communism and The Yugoslav National Question*, 186.
- 77 Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 132.
- 78 "Govor druga Edvarda Kardelja," in *Politika* (Belgrade) December 14, 1949, 1–2.
- 79 Predrag Marković, *Beograd između istoka i zapada, 1948–1965* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 1996) 325–26.
- 80 "That for us the rightist, artistic-counter-revolutionary Gerasimovshtina and Zhdanovshtina which uses the idealistic theory of comprehension of Todor Pavlov to that end, cannot be of use, is beyond all doubt." Miroslav Krleža, "Govor na kongresu književnika u Ljubljani," in Miroslav Krleža, *Eseji*, v. 6, in *Sabrana djela Miroslava Krleže* (Zagreb: Zora, 1967) v. 24, 57. Djilas claims the party approved Krleža's speech: Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, 291.
- 81 "(Predlog) Rezolucije o teorijskom radu u KPJ, Treći plenum CK KPJ (Juna 1951)," in Petranović and Zečević, *jugoslavija*, 830.
- 82 Borislav Mihajlović, *Književni razgovori: Izabrane kritike* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1971) 5.
- 83 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 142.
- 84 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 49.
- 85 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 17.
- 86 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 20; Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 49.
- 87 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 53; Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 28.
- 88 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 20.
- 89 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 49.

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- 90 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 30.
- 91 Aleksa Čelebonović, "Razgovori," from the catalog *Mića Popović: Slike i crteži* (Belgrade: Umetnički paviljon Cvijeta Zuzorića, November 23–December 16, 1979). This interview is not paginated.
- 92 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 170.
- 93 Marić, *Deca komunizma*, 215.
- 94 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 42.
- 95 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 244–45.
- 96 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 1, 247.
- 97 Lazar Trifunović labeled them "communards"; Lazar Trifunović, *Slikarstvo Miće Popovića* (Belgrade: SANU, 1983) 21.
- 98 Denegri, *Pedesete*, 32.
- 99 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 41.
- 100 "The lack of books on...modern painting, which could have served as some sort of source of information about that art, was felt not only in painters' ateliers, but also in art schools and libraries." Pavle Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1990), 34. Ugrinov reports that he himself stole a series of art books from the personal library of a lawyer who fled Ugrinov's Partisan unit in Novi Sad in 1944. By the end of the war he had been able to hold on to just one of the volumes, that on modern art, which "inspired me almost daily" (Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete*, 39).
- 101 See Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 38–39.
- 102 Ivan Tabaković, "Moj dnevnik (II)," in *Književnost* (Belgrade) v. 9/10, 1993, 995, 996, 1002, 1003–4.
- 103 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 27.
- 104 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 27.
- 105 "Zapisnik sastanka CK SKOJ-a održanog 24. aprila 1945.," in Petar Kačavenda, ed., *Kongresi, konferencije i sednice centralnih organa SKOJ-a (1941–1948)* (Belgrade: Izdavački centar Komunist, 1984) 15.





## CHAPTER 2

# Nonconformist Initiations

In 1951, Mića Popović moved to the Staro sajmište (“old fair grounds”), which had been constructed in the interwar period and served during the war as a German prison camp. After the war, the government parceled out the halls of the sajmište to artists as studios, but they came to serve as residences as well. Home also to “dark-skinned night workers, cleaners, and street sweepers, together with their wives and countless children,” the sajmište was located in New Belgrade, across the railroad bridge over the Sava River from Belgrade. Mihiz and Popović resided in the Italian Pavilion, while others, including the sculptor Olga Jevrić, the painter Lazar Vozarević, and the writer and dramatist Pavle Ugrinov lived elsewhere on the grounds. A sort of mystique has developed around life in the sajmište, not unlike the mystique that was later constructed around life in Simina 9a.

Popović’s atelier in the sajmište served as the setting for a legendary event in Serbian cultural life after the war. In 1954, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* was performed there after having been rejected for presentation by the governing council of the Belgrade Drama Theater, probably due to political pressure. *Godot* had already left a profound impression on Mihiz, who had seen it in its first season at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1952.<sup>1</sup> The Belgrade Drama Theater reasoned that the proposal to perform *Godot*, coming on the heels of Milovan Djilas’ humiliation by the League of Communists, could result in “complications.” At that moment, the performance of a play which at best testified to the alienation prevalent at that time seemed inopportune to the council of the theater. But the production had been fully prepared and dress rehearsals had been nearly completed, so the cast and crew were ready to present it elsewhere if the opportunity arose. According to Ugrinov, who was involved in the pro-

duction when it had been at the Belgrade Drama Theater, the French cultural attaché offered to let the performance go on in the garden of the French embassy.<sup>2</sup> After a time, though, a more compelling setting was found: Popović's forty-by-twenty-foot atelier. To Ugrinov's suggestion that his studio might serve well as an improvised theater, Popović reportedly responded simply, "Excellent!"<sup>3</sup>

With the exception of the painter Stojan Ćelić, who had done the original scenery but was now in Paris, the original cast and crew for the ill-fated Belgrade Drama Theater presentation showed up at Popović's atelier on the appointed night, along with about forty guests, who are said to have included all of the theater critics in Belgrade and the rest of the intelligentsia who were brave enough to attend an "illegal private meeting." The second half of the play was accompanied, as if on cue, by a storm. In the words of Popović: "Power went out. We lit candles. Lightning flashed and temporarily lit the scene dazzlingly. Thunder boomed above the very building. The finale of the production was simply magnificent."<sup>4</sup> The staging of *Godot* left an imprint on the Serbian intelligentsia of the era: the endless waiting of Vladimir and Estragon for guidance reflected the search for enduring values of Popović's generation.

#### AFFIRMATION

Popović was the first of the siminovci to establish himself. His one-man show at the Art Pavilion at Kalamegdan, which opened in September, 1950, consisted of 160 paintings and drawings ranging from his first works, from 1940, when he was a high school student, to those painted in 1950. "Interest in the exhibition," wrote the critic Pavle Vasić, "was so much the greater for the fact that Popović is the first painter from the generation formed during and after the war" to exhibit.<sup>5</sup> There has been some debate over the importance of this show, partly as a result of a certain dissonance between the paintings and the text of the catalog of the exhibit, written by Popović. The introduction proclaims the death of socialist realism, while the paintings themselves are generally agreed to have been less adventurous. In fact, the famous introduction to the catalog was choreographed: Miodrag Protić attended a meeting at Žika Stojković's house in an official capacity as a representative of ULUS to discuss with Popović his introductory statement.<sup>6</sup> The exhib-

it opened just a year after Kardelj's speech to the Slovene Academy in December 1949 and the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the KPJ held in the same month, the two events which heralded the beginning of the end of administrative measures and the hesitating birth of the *borba mišljenje*, which would be declared at the sixth party congress in 1952. Popović was thus the first painter to take advantage of the barely-liberalized atmosphere and proclaim his independence from socialist realism. No matter how choreographed, his catalog introduction is still taken as the first proclamation of an aesthetic other than the socialist realist in postwar Yugoslav painting.<sup>7</sup>

Popović recognized early his need to find his "own way" as a painter. "The search for one's own way in art coincides with the process of achieving personal self-consciousness."<sup>8</sup> This search ran counter in Popović's mind to the demands of socialist realism, which was not only an artistic doctrine but "a lifestyle, an understanding of the need for the entirety of human existence to be reduced to one dimension, and for other dimensions to be proclaimed not only superficial but harmful and forbidden."<sup>9</sup> His critique of socialist realism boiled down to two primary allegations: first, that socialist realism never had any resonance in Serbian culture, and thus never built its own justification within the culture;<sup>10</sup> second, that socialist realism's very artificiality meant that it had to be imposed, and thus it became one more tool in the hands of "totalitarians" who used it to enforce intolerance of other forms of expression.<sup>11</sup> But Popović did not dismiss socialist realism out of hand. By the 1960s, he would even express appreciation for it. Popović's writings include this flirtatious quote from 1960: "Maybe even socialist realism is not such a senseless demand! Maybe it is just formulated awkwardly! Maybe it's too much dogma! Maybe too little!"<sup>12</sup> And then of course came his conversion from abstract painting to realism in 1971, when he introduced *Scenes*, a return to *social* realism, a turn which demanded some sort of reckoning with the earlier Stalinist principles.

Popović's 1950 exposition attacked socialist realism on three fronts: its notion of the *theme*, the question of the incorporation of artistic inheritances from the past, and the acceptability of seeking one's own form of expression. His attack was sometimes veiled, sometimes quite open. For instance, in a somewhat cloaked attack on the didactic nature of socialist realism, Popović asserted that "the content

of the painting begins right where the viewer predisposed to literature thinks that it ends—that is, in the theme.” To those inclined to the socialist realist pedagogy, who argued that the proper painting for the proletariat would educate literally, Popović suggests that for them “Van Gogh’s sunflowers would remain an average botany textbook.” Instead, he proposes, “the method by which [they] are composed, drawn, colored and created from material, thus the form, that is at the same time also...the content of the painting...deeply human, powerful, and fully defined psychologically.”<sup>13</sup>

More openly, Popović criticized the current fashion of rejecting impressionism while embracing the old masters:

one dare not skip over that which is already discovered...impressionism, with its lessons on color and atmosphere, was as important a discovery as, for instance, the discovery of perspective...to force in our era the methods of classical painting, robbed of impressionist truths, means to be backwards.

In place of the standard practice of parceling out the heritage of European art into the acceptable and the unacceptable, Popović argues that “socialist art must have its [own] content and its [own] form, if only because the border between those two concepts is not marked, because they mutually condition each other; in short, because they cannot be separated.”<sup>14</sup> What remains, then, of socialist art is an art which is arrived at by painters working on their own forms of expression, as socialists, utilizing the lessons of the past in creating a new synthesis of form and content for this era. Popović then had the same goal as the cultural leaders of the socialist realist regime, but he believed that the new art must emerge as individual inspiration rather than as a result of regime pedagogy.

In his most open and confrontational passage, Popović noted that in ULUS meetings “what was called discussion was reduced to the repetition of poor, vulgar theories between those who accepted them and those whose job was to get them accepted.” But his reading of the conclusions of the Third Plenum told him that now the state would encourage “that which comes before truthful art—the right to seek it.”<sup>15</sup> Popović then offered an eloquent testimony to the value of finding “one’s own expression”:

The need to proclaim an experience, to say something personal, in and of itself takes its own form. The reason for art probably lies in that need. Every creation which is undertaken for some other reason: political speculation, forceful maintenance of achieved reputation, profit, or something similar, can be useful for the creator, and perhaps even visionary for society, but such a creation is not art. To have something to say brings with it one requirement and one power: that one be sincere. It seems to me that only complete sincerity in the choosing of motif and before the chosen motif can underlie true art.<sup>16</sup>

The 1950 exhibition drew 7,000 visitors in its first two weeks (with “young visitors from the exhibitor’s generation in especially notable numbers”).<sup>17</sup> Critics treated it kindly but somewhat patronizingly. The paintings in the exhibition ranged from his earliest efforts to his work with the Zadar Group. Miodrag Protić describes them as “daring within acceptable limits,” which is not all that daring.<sup>18</sup> Mihiz—no art critic—described Popović’s paintings in the Kalamegdan exhibition as “neorealism,” as opposed to “new realism,” the regime’s term for socialist realism.<sup>19</sup>

The paintings betrayed a whole host of influences and by general consensus announced a painter of some unrealized potential. Several of them help situate Popović: *Self-Portrait with Mask* (1947), *Citizens* (1949), and *New Belgrade* (1950). *Self-Portrait with Mask* speaks for itself as a metaphor for the painter living under false pretenses, exemplifying the difficulties inherent in living the aesthetic he proclaimed in his 1950 exhibition catalog. *Citizens* had been deemed unworthy of the new era by Branko Šotra in the eighth ULUS exhibition in June 1949.<sup>20</sup> Regime critics, who believed it represented a *slava* (Popović denied this) saw in it a longing for the past. At the very least, it illustrated people who appeared unmoved, apathetic, which was unacceptable in the era of socialist construction.<sup>21</sup> A fruitful comparison can be made between Boža Ilić’s *Sounding the Terrain in New Belgrade* and Popović’s *New Belgrade*. Whereas Ilić’s version focuses on the collective struggle of the laborers, Popović’s workers are more distant, not clearly enthusiastic, and the painting’s effect is less inspiring, more of a record than a prescription. Even though the exhibition demonstrated Popović’s debt to interwar figural painting, the fact that it was

the first truly independent exhibition in postwar Yugoslavia, taken with the aggressive catalog notes and the timing—relatively early in the period of liberalization following the Tito–Stalin split—made it an event, and one that is remembered as a critical part of Popović’s resume to this day.

Popović’s Zadar experience and 1950 exhibition marked him as a rebel right away. Mihiz had to work his way into the Serbian public conscience. By 1951, with Ćosić’s help, he was working in a unique field, writing criticism for *NIN* (Nedeljne informativne novine), the new weekly founded in 1951 whose editor, Stevan Majstorović, described it as “not quite official” in an era when most publications in Yugoslavia were pretty much official.<sup>22</sup> *NIN* was one of Ćosić’s initiatives. It began publishing in 1951 and has continued without interruption to this day.<sup>23</sup> The weekly was edited and staffed by veterans of *Mladi borac*, who appealed to Ćosić to support their venture with the Central Committee of the KPS. *NIN* would earn a quick reputation as a relatively open voice.<sup>24</sup> Still, Mihiz’s installation as *NIN*’s literary critic seems odd. His personal history made him an unlikely candidate to be a regime-sanctioned critic. It was quite a coup for the non-communist and little-known writer from Irig, who claims to have been invited to join the staff precisely because he was not a communist. In reality, he would not have been given the job without Ćosić’s endorsement.<sup>25</sup> Mihiz, Popović, and Stojković would regularly require their patron’s help. Given the new regime’s need to nurture new talent, it is not surprising to hear that his bosses tolerated Ćosić’s friendship with Simina 9a’s “heretics” because “the leadership at that time wanted to win over as many followers as possible.”<sup>26</sup> Mihiz made the most of Ćosić’s gift, quickly creating a place for himself in the public eye.

The staff of *NIN* envisioned Mihiz as “a stubborn opposition journalist.” He would become the most popular literary commentator in Serbia, working formally for *NIN* until 1954.<sup>27</sup> He was allowed to choose his subjects and write with a minimum of oversight. His editors requested only the requisite self-censorship, to which Mihiz assented. He would later reminisce longingly about his days with *NIN*:

Newspapers are of life and for life, that which flows and that which will flow, for the scent of days which pass never to return. Broad-minded and fanatically intolerant at the same time, they provide

shelter, feed, and give voice to the first fashionable idiocy that they find, easily and jovially, under one single condition: that they are not boring or tired.<sup>28</sup>

As a critic, Mihiz wished not only to criticize but to do so eloquently. He modeled himself after two predecessors who “were the first among us who made literature out of literary criticism”: Jovan Skerlić and Antun Gustav Matoš.<sup>29</sup> Skerlić and Matoš were contemporaries and rivals, so the challenge of somehow melding the two into his own work also appealed to Mihiz: “anyone among us who engages in this work must choose between Scylla and Charibdes. Or, at his own risk, sail between them.”<sup>30</sup>

Skerlić and Matoš are interesting choices as mentors for a critic working in the early 1950s. Skerlić, a university professor, the premier Serbian literary presence of his own era, and a prolific writer until his early death in 1914, represented the decadent, formalistic literary establishment against which the interwar surrealists and social writers reacted. Matoš was a Croat who deserted from the Austro-Hungarian army in 1894, only to find a comfortable part-time refuge in the bohemian Belgrade that Skerlić could not stomach.<sup>31</sup> He unashamedly placed form ahead of substance in his criticism. Where Skerlić was reserved, Matoš was acid-tongued and venomous, even towards those who might have been his friends; where Skerlić sought order and rigor in literature, Matoš sought individuality and ardor. As Matoš put it: “We are different poles. He is the socialist; I, the nationalist. He is, or claims to be, Yugoslav; I am Croatian. He is a realist, I am not. He, the professor; I, the Bohemian. He preaches, I mock.”<sup>32</sup> A further distinction must be made, one with relevance to the 1950s in which Mihiz wrote: Matoš valued aesthetics, Skerlić sought social and political engagement. Could Mihiz “sail between” the two extremes and be a critic for all tastes?

There were other extremes to navigate: being a literary critic in the early 1950s meant taking sides in the modernist/realist debate, but Mihiz refused. His enthusiasm respected no such borders. He praised equally Mihailo Lalić (a realist) and Oskar Davičo (a modernist). In a piece written in 1953 as a summation of postwar Serbian literature to that point, he firmly rejected as false the division between modernism and realism. Furthermore, he disparaged the foundation upon which

that debate was conducted—that there was such a thing as a socialist literature, that such a measure could even be applied. “There is not, there does not exist, there never has been, and there will never be a literary direction that is socialist in and of itself, and there is no formal literary method that is a priori antisocialist.”<sup>33</sup> For him, the debate was “forced”; one picked sides and then “automatically prejudged the worth of a given work.” Mihiz resented the use of administrative methods by the party as much as he resented the superficial epithets of the writers themselves.<sup>34</sup>

The modernists are, a priori, people without links to reality, sterile, too French;...conservatives [realists] are, apriori, hard people, they use the means of political demagoguery, they will not suffer a broadening of literary and psychological viewpoints, they do not read and they know nothing...and so on a priori, all that, before the fact, forever.<sup>35</sup>

This situation annoyed Mihiz. He found the methods of both sides to be beside the point, a fundamental misreading of the literary history of his people: there had always been realists and modernists, there had always been conflict and competition between the two literary visions, and the politicization of the debate sapped it of its potential for provoking real growth in Serbian literature. In place of “a priori” judgments, Mihiz believed that he utilized real criteria—which could be contested, but which, he asserted, were strictly literary:

My value criterion is different: how much a work includes less manner and more living artistic truth, how much a work brings new content, new viewpoints, and more life, how much a work has stronger and firmer links to the soil on which it was born, and with the time about which or from which it speaks.<sup>36</sup>

Good literature, Mihiz believed, linked “our most contemporary modernity with the noble threads of our tradition.”<sup>37</sup>

These ideas Mihiz laid out most forcefully in November 1954, at a special meeting of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia.<sup>38</sup> This meeting was not a planned session; rather, it was called precisely to clear up some of the controversy and indecision that plagued Yugoslav writers



at that time. Writers were receiving mixed messages: the *borba mišljenja* had been approved, even declared, in 1952 at the Sixth Congress of the KPJ/LCY, and the 1952 Congress of Yugoslav Writers had met, with Miroslav Krleža delivering the opening speech which called for an engaged literature freed of the strictures of socialist realism; furthermore, in 1953, *Nova misao* (New Thought) had been launched by Djilas in the spirit of the new ideological struggle, yet a year later Djilas fell and Djilasism entered the lexicon of post-split Yugoslav politics; no writer felt certain that literary politics were autonomous from daily politics; and finally, although it had appeared to many writers that the modernist/realist debate had lost steam in 1953, by late 1954 it was obvious that it had not. The November plenum of the Yugoslav Writers' Union was intended to clear the air. Eleven Yugoslav writers delivered addresses. "All improvisation was excluded," according to Stanislav Vinaver.<sup>39</sup>

Krleža gave the keynote address, which emphasized several themes: that Yugoslav literature was in a deep crisis; that Yugoslav writers were too busy borrowing from the west, which had little to offer; that modernism had taken the autonomy of art to excess; and that still as always, Yugoslav society required an engaged art and literature.<sup>40</sup> Other speakers ranged across the spectrum, but Krleža oddly found himself on the conservative side of the aisle at this meeting. He attempted to strike a balance that was uncomfortable for most, especially those on whom he might have counted in earlier periods—the modernists. For instance, while he rejected western influences (associated with the modernists), he also spurned strict bureaucratic control of art and literature (associated with the realists). He characterized the preceding few years as ones of profound crisis in Yugoslav writing, which offended the modernists, who had of course initiated the "crisis" with their challenge to socialist realism, and then realism in general.

Mihiz was not a scheduled speaker, but he tendered commentary on Krleža's keynote address.<sup>41</sup> Mihiz felt that the speech revealed a Krleža whose earlier creative, experimental voice had been quieted by fear of the new.<sup>42</sup> Mihiz first observed that Krleža, like his contemporary Milan Bogdanović (who was the vice-president of the SkJ), had "become blind to new colors."<sup>43</sup> The substance of Mihiz's comments focused on three issues: the so-called crisis in Yugoslav literature; the

poverty of western literature and Yugoslav over-reliance on it; and the conflict of “modern and conservative” styles. In each area he believed Krleža’s fears were misplaced. Although Mihiz framed his remarks respectfully, Stanislav Vinaver noted that Mihiz’s conclusion was “as dazzling at the blade of a yataghan: that Krleža’s judgment betrays serious signs of senility.”<sup>44</sup>

Mihiz would have none of the crisis identified by Krleža. Pointing out that Ivo Andrić, Mihailo Lalić, Oskar Davičo and Petar Šegedin had all published their best work since the war, and that Vasko Popa and Miodrag Pavlović had emerged as brilliant modernist poets, Mihiz asserted that “there is no crisis in literature, and periods which look like crisis are most often those in which good literature is created.”<sup>45</sup> Mihiz contended that hindsight would prove that this was not a barren era, much the contrary. He also challenged Krleža’s dismissal of western literature and western influences on Yugoslav literatures. He discerned “provincialism” in Yugoslavia’s relationship to foreign art and literature—first in its idolization of the west, but also in its (paradoxical) knee-jerk rejection of western influences. Mihiz believed that Yugoslav literature enjoyed a natural relationship with foreign literature: “...I must say that I cannot imagine the greater part of our literature, from its beginnings to the present, [existing] without the influence of foreign literature.”<sup>46</sup> Finally, Mihiz dismissed the modernist/realist debate insofar as it was thought to be a product of modern times, the socialist era, of left-oriented literature. He compared the current modernists and realists to two contemporaries from a century and a half before: Zaharija Orfelin and Dositej Obradović.

Dositej Obradović turned entirely to the West, had a healthy soul, [was a] sober, worldly, active social participant; and we had Zaharija Orfelin, a free spirit. Thus, if I may so state it, one poet of dreams, as was Zaharije Orfelin, who was a wild soul, and one realist, who extracted his ideas from the West. They lived parallel lives, but were extraordinarily different.

For Mihiz, modernism and realism were the continuation of past traditions, past conflicts—between western-oriented materialism and the poetry of dreams.<sup>47</sup> Mihiz concluded with a bit more comment on the

notion of “crisis.” Rather than fearing it, he found crisis to be at the center of literary creativity.

To those radiant lovers of harmony and nice comradely relations in literature, who holler and ask: “Whence the strained situation in literature?”, I would answer with another question: And what sort of situation would you like in place of strained? Dulled, perhaps? Not me, thanks.<sup>48</sup>

Mihiz’s comments were remarkably bold. They provide a key to understanding his approach: good literature acknowledges, if not reveres, its own traditions; it is open to outside stimuli; and it thrives on the competition of ideas and forms.

Whereas Popović and Mihiz struggled against the tide in the early years of Tito’s Yugoslavia, Ćosić simply rode it, carried effortlessly to the top thanks to his active involvement with the party and the new regime. After the war, Ćosić took advantage of his position and his inclinations to provide cover for his friends and, after the Tito–Stalin split, to press for a bit of liberalization. Aside from *NIN*, described above, Ćosić takes credit for several other initiatives, one of which was the “off Broadway” theater Atelje 212, which opened in 1955. It was the brainstorm of Mira Trajlović, with the support of Mihiz, Ćosić, Mića Popović, Dušan Matić (another of Belgrade’s interwar surrealists) and a few others. Mihiz came up with the name: the founders viewed the theater as the spiritual heir to Popović’s atelier (the scene of the first staging of *Waiting for Godot*), and it held 212 seats; thus, Mihiz proposed, Atelje 212. Trajlović envisioned it as a self-sufficient “small stage” for avant-garde productions, without the “bureaucratic apparatus” or a regular ensemble,<sup>49</sup> and sold the idea to the Belgrade city administration with the help of Ćosić and a promise not to ask for money. *Waiting for Godot* was presented in its first week, that of March 1, 1955.<sup>50</sup> It would later be at the center of many a storm, as its productions tweaked the bureaucratic sensibilities of Serbia’s communist leadership in the late 1960s and 1970s. Although Ćosić was not a particularly visible founder of the theater, he had some influence. It had already been felt in the work of the Belgrade Drama Theater, a more formal presence.<sup>51</sup> Aside from contributing in some small or large way

to the foundation of these theaters, Ćosić has also been credited with supporting a more adventurous theater repertoire before it was acceptable, as the socialist-realist regime gave way in the early 1950s. Soja Jovanović, who would become a leading theater director in the 1950s, has noted that she directed Branislav Nušić's "Suspicious Person" in 1948 with the help of Ćosić, who arranged for rehearsal space and some funding. Velibor Gligorić, one of the new regime's favored writers (and "a complete Zhdanovite" in Jovanović's opinion) condemned it; Ćosić told her to "be patient and work, your time will come."<sup>52</sup>

Ćosić wanted to write. He was a storyteller: after listening to Ćosić tell war stories for an entire May 1945 night in Sarajevo, the actress Nada Čarapić is said to have "begged him on her knees to leave politics and start writing."<sup>53</sup> He also credits his friends from Simina 9a with having stoked his desire to write. Stojković reports that he heard the "first, oral version of the chronicle-novel of the Rasinski detachment...on the spot on May 1, 1947, late in the evening and the entire following night."<sup>54</sup> Ćosić began writing what would become *Far Away is the Sun* (*Daleko je sunce*) in 1949, but it took several false starts for him to find his writer's touch and complete the book, which was published with the support of Milan Bogdanović and Isidora Sekulić.<sup>55</sup> Ćosić claims to have been self-taught, never having studied literature in school, a veritable primitive in the modern city after the war. Bogdanović not only taught him how to watch plays, but "how to drink wine" afterwards.<sup>56</sup> *Far Away is the Sun* appeared in 1951. The book was the product of his desire to prove to the world and the Soviets that the Yugoslav Partisan war was real, that people fought and died out of commitment to communism, that Stalin and his Cominform lackeys unfairly denigrated the revolution. Ćosić confirms in his diaries that the book was a preordained success, with praise coming in even before it was published.<sup>57</sup> He and his reviewers agreed that it suffered from poor character development, but also that it showed that one could write honestly about Partisans.<sup>58</sup> It was a success, translated into numerous languages<sup>59</sup> and becoming a standard on the reading list of all Yugoslav schoolchildren.<sup>60</sup>

*Far Away is the Sun* chronicles the ordeals of a Partisan detachment in the winter of 1942/43.<sup>61</sup> The action concerns the fate of four characters, or better, two pairs of characters: Commissar Pavle and Commander Uča, the political and military leaders of the detachment

respectively; and Vuk, the captain of one četa in the detachment, and Deputy Commander Gvozden (Uča's second-in-command). There are two themes that drive the action, one dependent on the other: first, the leaders of the surrounded detachment must decide whether to remain where they are (as Uča wishes, on Jastrebac) or to divide up and cross the Morava River (favored by Pavle); second, the detachment must deal with the behavior of the Gvozden, who has shown signs of cowardice. Each of these sets of tensions illuminates the main point of the story, which is that Partisans fight for the higher ideal of communism and for all of the people of Serbia (and, by extension but not expressly, Yugoslavia) and do not fight for anything that can be characterized as local, provincial, or narrow. Beyond that didactic task, the novel has some depth, and reveals ambivalence on the personal level as men and women attempt to fulfill their higher calling. We can also divine, more or less in passing, some of Ćosić's personal goals for a communist Yugoslavia.

The central tension in the novel is between Pavle and Uča, the commissar and the commander, representing the political and the military sides of the Partisan equation. Both are communists, of course. The decision that they face is a difficult one: encircled by Germans on Jastrebac, should they continue to fight as a single detachment on the mountain, or should they divide in two, move off the mountain and across the Morava river, and then take up the fight again? The decision has both military and political sides: Who should decide? Which decision will save the detachment? Is saving the detachment more important than fighting Germans, Četniks, Ljotićevci, Nedićevci, and Bulgarians? What does the regional party leadership say? Pavle and Uča, closest of friends until this fateful moment, disagree on the next move: Uča believes they should stay on Jastrebac, Pavle equally strongly believes they should divide up and head across the Morava. Each will throw the weight of his position into the struggle: Uča knows military strategy, Pavle is the representative of the party. The conflict, however, does not remain on the level of competing authorities. Other factors are at work.

The other important pair of characters are Vuk and Gvozden, the first the head of one četa in the detachment, the other Uča's deputy. Like many of the men, Gvozden is from Jastrebac. Early in the story, Uča's plan has the quiet approval of the men from the region. They see

no reason to fight on the other side of the river. When Mališa, a very young fighter, asks “why should we go fight for others?,” he speaks for many.<sup>62</sup> Gvozden also agrees with Uča that it would be best to remain, although his position is not as openly provincial as that of the diminutive Mališa. The decision, though, is eventually posed as one between local needs—fighting the enemy in and around one’s own village and one’s own people—and the higher goal, as represented by the commissar, Pavle. Vuk would be one of Pavle’s firmest supporters in the crisis, but he also has more provincial motives (which he, unlike Gvozden and Mališa, never openly reveals): his wife and child are at home in their village, which lies across the Morava. “His greatest desire was to cross into his region and to take revenge on them [Četniks]....His desire would be fulfilled with Pavle’s proposal, and he would surely go with the četa.”<sup>63</sup>

One of the basic questions that the novel could be expected to address (given Ćosić’s own stated purpose of countering Soviet post-split propaganda) is the nature of party authority. Early in the dispute between Uča and Pavle, the head of the detachment’s youth organization, Vukšan, is troubled by his first taste of uncertainty:

For Vukšan...the party meeting would remain forever in his memory. At it, he lived through his first disappointment in his childish notions about the party. He could in no way imagine that communists, and old and good communists at that, would not agree, would argue, would even perhaps hate each other.<sup>64</sup>

Vukšan favors Uča’s plan, but also is certain that if there is disagreement among the party members, it must be that one of them is an “opportunist.” In the end, he decides that he “will obey the party...it never errs.”<sup>65</sup> In spite of his own agreement with Uča’s military diagnosis, he opts for the party, in the person of Pavle.

The key scene in the story occurs relatively early: when Gvozden is deeply shaken by the tragic slaughter of Serbian hostages in the hands of the Germans, he breaks down. Most unsettling for him is the discovery of a young child alive beneath a dead cow. The survivors of the massacre report on the German policy of murdering one hundred hostages for every killed German soldier. Gvozden is sickened, and concludes that the only way to save the local people is to temporarily

disband the detachment altogether. Pavle appeals to his party loyalty. Gvozden responds:

Well look at what misfortune this is for the people. Are you a communist? Do you think about the people? You are a commissar? The party does not dare do the things we do! This is not the party line! This is the destruction of the people! We need to protect the people and the detachment.<sup>66</sup>

Gvozden will not be reconciled either to leaving the mountain or continuing to fight. Pavle concludes that something must be done, lest Gvozden's defeatism contaminate the entire detachment. The first thing Pavle does is to use Gvozden's actions against Uča: "objectively, your position leads to the destruction of the detachment," he tells Uča, who refuses to believe that his own desire to stay on Jastrebac has opened the door to Gvozden's breakdown.<sup>67</sup> But Pavle's view wins out. The episode concludes with the most dramatic scene in the novel. Pavle rallies the detachment's party members to judge Gvozden, who is condemned to death by a committee including Uča and Vuk. Vuk, the man who has his own personal reasons for supporting Pavle, then executes the unlucky deputy commander.<sup>68</sup>

*Far Away is the Sun* has rightly been described as a novel which depicts the tension between the higher goals of communism and the localisms that plagued pre-communist Yugoslavia.<sup>69</sup> Ćosić's Pavle emerges by the end of the novel as the victorious figure: Gvozden and Uča are dead, Vuk takes Uča's place as commander of the detachment. However, this novel has many ambiguities. None of the characters could be expected to be portrayed in the stark terms demanded by socialist realism—this was the first Partisan novel to appear after the end of that cultural phase, but Ćosić's Partisan unit is riven with contradictory impulses. For instance, can anyone reading this novel be convinced that the execution of Gvozden was thoroughly just, except according to the most rigid logic of the revolution? Pavle explains that logic: "You thought that we would just do battle with the enemy? No, this showed that even people like Gvozden can harm us. Why?! Our battle is not just war, but revolution. It has its own moral, and that is battle to the end without regard for one's self."<sup>70</sup> While the reader (the Yugoslav of 1951) was probably meant to come away having learned

the lesson that Pavle learned, one wonders, for instance, if contemporary readers could have overlooked Vuk's duplicity as he personally executed a man who stood in the way of his own personal fight, across the river. Even Pavle's doubts must have remained with readers who were not previously inclined to share the revolutionary moral. The novel is marked by ambivalence.

The ambivalence might be the result of the fact that one finds Ćosić's voice in many of the characters—none is truly his alter ego. The only characters whom the author dislikes are the occasional cowards. Uča, Vuk, Pavle, and Gvozden, four main characters divided by unbridgeable chasms in belief and loyalties, all emerge as admirable figures. Through them, we learn Ćosić's dreams for the revolution. Uča looks forward to radical change:

It's strange...this blood, this fate of ours. I know a little history and do not know of another people that have had a similar fate. In all of our history we have had in all two occupations: farming and war. And other peoples have created culture, science, industry, cities, and other miracles. It's time for our people to abandon old occupations for good, and to take up these others. That for me is revolution. Somehow I believe that this is the last war for us. We've probably fought enough.<sup>71</sup>

Anyone familiar with Ćosić will recognize an early rendition of a theme that would recur in his work: the notion that Serbs (for Uča is not talking about "Yugoslavs" here) have been fated to war. Beyond that, however, we see a theme that is less well-known but just as prominent in Ćosić's work: the need to abandon old ways and bring Serbia fully into the modern world. The preparation for such a radical transformation can be found in the words of Pavle the commissar, which echo Zogović's interpretation of Njegoš's *The Mountain Wreath*: "When I think about our generation, it reminds me of a young forest which storms have attacked and torn up root and trunk...broken its branches...broken it all! Only the strong and powerful remain whole. Yes, Vojo, that is revolution!"<sup>72</sup> *Far Away is the Sun* found a prominent place in the canon of postwar Yugoslav literature. Although the novel was just a few steps removed from the socialist realist norm that was expiring as Ćosić wrote, *Far Away is the Sun* marked Ćosić's challenge to that orthodoxy.



Ćosić intended to follow up on *Far Away is the Sun* by pursuing a deeper examination of the phenomenon of Stalinism in Yugoslavia. Thus, he asked for and received permission to travel to Goli Otok, the most notorious internment camp for alleged “cominformists,” as those loyal to Stalin were called in Yugoslavia. He claims that he went in the spirit of authorial inquiry and not in any other capacity. It is impossible to know why he really went, whether he is telling the truth, and thus impossible to render judgment. He has been accused of having gone as an interrogator for the regime; he claims he went to better understand the enemy, but with compassion. He claims he returned and informed Ranković what was going on, and that Ranković was shocked. The entire story, which Ćosić recounts in interviews from 1988, seems rather sanitized, but there is no way to ascertain whether there is more to know. The tale of Ćosić’s trip to Goli Otok has, however, been used against him as evidence of his close collaboration with the regime.

Mihiz challenged orthodoxies as well, as an outsider. He sought certain qualities in the books he reviewed, and he did not often review a book he did not like. In spite of his mild iconoclasm, Mihiz only tested the limits of the tolerance of the government and his editors a couple of times. One of the times came with his reviews of a couple of books by Marko Ristić, whom Mihiz abhorred. Ristić was one of the small prewar group of Belgrade surrealists. They were lively participants in the “struggle on the literary left,” many, including Ristić, sharing the field with Krleža in support of revolutionary free expression. Djilas, a sympathetic observer, has said that “it would have been hard to find anyone who so loathed his own class, and what smacked of it, as did Ristić.”<sup>73</sup> But that loathing was a common element among surrealists, as it was among the avant-garde of the interwar period in general. As the grandson of Jovan Ristić, the nineteenth-century Serbian politician, Ristić had much to detest. Ristić’s surrealism and his love for France went hand in hand. One even wonders whether his ferocious demands for vengeance on collaborators were inspired by the same tragic phenomenon in post-liberation France, where the call for punishment for collaborators acted as catharsis for intellectuals who sat out the war.<sup>74</sup>

Aside from becoming communist Yugoslavia’s first ambassador to France in 1945, Ristić joined the literary struggles of the post-split era with gusto. Although not a founder or editor of any of the modernist journals, he actively supported the modernist cause after 1952. Much

of his work published after the war consisted, however, of reprints of his essays and literary criticism from the 1930s, the heyday of Serbian surrealism. Two such books appeared in 1952, one (*Literary Politics* [Književna politika]) followed closely by the other (*Space-Time* [Prostor-vreme]).<sup>75</sup> The first collection was much more coherent than the second: *Literary Politics* gathered those articles from the prewar that Ristić thought would be a “literary-historical retrospective of a battle against reactionary thought” as well as a “weapon in the battle against the remainders of reactionary thought.”<sup>76</sup> In his own words, his “idee-fixe” was “the disdain, or even the scorning of ‘beautiful literature,’ literature *as such*, literature in the traditional sense of the word, in the first place so-called belles-lettres.”<sup>77</sup> The timing of the book’s publication implied that Ristić viewed it as a contribution to the opening up of literary life following the collapse of the socialist-realist regime. Ristić understood, even reveled in, the fact that his contributions were both literary and political, for he (and those of his generation, those who fought the battle on the left in the 1930s) could not imagine a literature that was not intensely political—the linkage of art and political life was real for him. *Space-Time*, the second book to appear in 1952 from Ristić’s hand, was no less political; in fact, it included his liberation-era articles calling for death to traitors.

Mihiz’s reviews were crushing. On *Literary Politics*: “As with every critic who bases his work predominantly on the destruction of an aesthetic, so too is Marko Ristić stronger when he destroys than when he builds.”<sup>78</sup> Ristić would never deny that he wished to obliterate pre-revolutionary literary norms, any literature that proposed to be measured for its beauty rather than its moral, any literature that shirked engagement. “Openly biased...he viewed all literature to that point [the 1930s] as disqualified, acknowledging from almost the entire history of our literature (which, it seems to me, he does not know very well) only Dis.”<sup>79</sup> What also offended Mihiz about this book is likely to intrigue modern readers: an “index” of those mentioned in the body of the book. It included the likes of Sigmund Freud and St. Francis of Assisi, Draža Mihailović and Slobodan Jovanović, Miroslav Krleža and Miloš Crnjanski, plus dozens of others. Some had lengthy biographies, others a few words. Arbitrary and final in its pronouncements, Ristić undoubtedly viewed it as a product of his approach, the surrealist’s love of coincidence and paradox. Ristić’s index is the moral equivalent of his

liberation-era articles in *Politika*: damning but self-serving, random yet puritanical. Some entries represented casual character assassinations, others whimsical forays into a history he had no reason to understand or to expect the reader to care about (the entry on Krleža is a long aside on the various historical events that occurred on the same day as the great Croatian writer's birth). His one word verdict on Vladislav Živojinović Massuka—gloomy (*mračan*)—enraged Mihiz, who finished his review of *Literary Politics* with an index entry of his own:

MARKO RISTIĆ—writer whose works, by his own admission, are exhausted. As a former writer he became an ambassador, as a former ambassador he again became a writer. During the occupation he lived under the Occupation. A good part of his life he spent warring with professors, academics, and ambassadors. Fate wished that he himself would become an ambassador and academic, and since Nemesis is consistent, it is expected that he will soon become a professor. Not gloomy. Not light, either. So—half gloomy. His links to pathos are of astronomical origins. In recent times he has taken up the exhumation of literature.<sup>80</sup>

In the same issue of *NIN*, Stevan Majstorović gave Ristić a positive review. Mihiz has claimed that Majstorović's review was done in good humor to distance *NIN* from what was bound to be a controversial evaluation of an important and favored Yugoslav writer.<sup>81</sup>

The publication of *Place-Time* gave Mihiz the welcome opportunity to renew his dismissal of Ristić.<sup>82</sup> Here Ristić was a writer of "great culture,...little talent and weak creativity" who had shown with this book that he "is a better stylist than original thinker and ideologue."<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that virtually no other Serbian critics felt the same way about Ristić as Mihiz.<sup>84</sup> But Ristić's judgments were secondary in most critics' eyes to the fundamental role he played in fueling the revolt in Serbian literature against tradition, a role that he continued to play in the modernist/realist debate of the 1950s, and a role that Palavestra and especially Mišić found convincing. The irony is that Mihiz himself claimed (much later) to favor the modernists in that debate, "less out of aesthetic convictions...more out of the consciousness that it was a struggle for the freedom of expression, struggle for freedom in general."<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, Ristić was precisely the opposite of what Mihiz

looked for in a writer. Where Ristić envisioned the destruction of pre-revolutionary literary models and a complete transformation of Serbian literature, Mihiz sought modern connections with older models.

Marko Ristić never responded to Mihiz, which is no surprise, given the generational difference between them and the fact that Ristić occupied a far higher place in the Yugoslav cultural hierarchy than Mihiz. However, they did share strong but contrary feelings on one subject, a subject that allows us to imagine the contours of a debate between them. The subject was Miloš Crnjanski. When Mihiz died in 1997, one of his eulogists remarked wistfully that he “still owes us...a book about Crnjanski.”<sup>86</sup> Crnjanski, author of *Diary about Čarnojević* (*Dnevnik o Čarnojeviću*) and *Migrations* (*Seobe*), which is universally considered one of the greatest novels in Serbian literature, was clearly Mihiz’s favorite author. Crnjanski had become active in right-wing politics in the 1930s, and after the war remained in England, his reputation tarnished. Interestingly, Crnjanski was also once a friend and collaborator of Ristić, who published in 1954 a lengthy essay on Crnjanski, Rastko Petrović, and Paul Eluard entitled “Three Dead Poets.”<sup>87</sup> The title alone conveys the sense of Ristić’s piece, especially given the knowledge that Crnjanski had many years yet to live. Living or dead, though, Ristić argued that one could not be a poet and a right-winger, never mind a fascist, as he believed Crnjanski had become.<sup>88</sup> Mihiz, of course, later described the essay as “shameful.”

Ristić composed “Three Dead Poets” in his typical first person, in this case a cloying prose that faked sympathy with his “dead” colleagues. “I look at them now, they are three poets, three authentic poets. I look at them, phantoms. I had three friends, three poets. Three fates. I am speaking of dead poets, of dead friends. I will speak about how poetry dies in a living poet, how friendship dies.”<sup>89</sup>

The thesis of Ristić’s piece, which is, like much of his work, rather seductive, is that Crnjanski, Petrović, and Eluard all faced an existential decision at a certain point in their careers: “How to live,” as Ristić put it. “We knew that there was something much more important on the agenda in literature than [mere] literature...”<sup>90</sup> Crnjanski, whose early prose and poetry had inspired Ristić’s generation, “turned into his own opposite, found release in the glorification of war and fascism.”<sup>91</sup> Describing Crnjanski’s fall, which he dates between 1919 and 1929, Ristić does not even honor his classic novel *Migrations*,

which appeared in the latter year: that “secretive presence of poetry” that Ristić noted in *Migrations* “could be heard ... in travel writing and essays which Crnjanski wrote between 1922 and 1930.”<sup>92</sup> Crnjanski’s degradation was complete by the early 1930s.

It is disgusting and bitter to remember how, after the death of the poet Crnjanski, a gentleman with the same name flitted between editorial boards, the palace, ministries, courts and the police.... the poet was dead; the rebel became a conformist, the promiscuous son returned to the true path, the dreamer came to his senses, the nihilist repented, the anarchist became a monarchist, spite remained spite.<sup>93</sup>

Crnjanski, Petrović, Eluard: all are judged ultimately according to their choice to embrace or disdain the future, which for Marko Ristić meant surrealism. In “Three Dead Poets,” Ristić uses both politics and poetics to measure the careers of his three subjects, but one senses, in fact it is impossible not to conclude, that this essay represents a bit of literary triumphalism.

Mihiz placed Crnjanski at the pinnacle of Serbian prose writing: “the most gifted writer of the Serbian language, as long as it has been written and spoken.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, he refused to disqualify Crnjanski because of his political choices: “He was not the conscience of his time, nor its morals, nor its roadmap.”<sup>95</sup> In fact, where Ristić was disgusted by Crnjanski’s refusal to move forward in his poetry, instead embracing and renewing his commitment to the modernism in which he was steeped, it was Crnjanski’s evocation of a Serbian past that endeared him to Mihiz most deeply. When Crnjanski allowed the Serbian Literary Guild to publish his *Second Book of Migrations* (*Druga knjiga seoba*) in 1962, thirty-three years after the first volume, some critics lamented its archaic tone. Mihiz welcomed it as “re-creative to an exceptionally great degree, because it wishes to capture a time, to capture people from a certain time, and to recreate them in a book.”<sup>96</sup> Other critics found fault with the second book for its lack of a “poetic impulse” in comparison to the first volume; Mihiz responded that he had “the impression ... that Crnjanski did not want that in the second part of *Seobe*, that he stopped himself...”<sup>97</sup> For Mihiz, in other words, Crnjanski was not only not rooted to a style that time had passed by,

he was dedicated to resuscitating that style—a goal that Ristić would have found ridiculously beside the point for a twentieth-century writer of any ambition whatsoever.

Mihiz's devotion to Crnjanski reflected his fidelity to Serbia and its cultural traditions. For Popović, though, Serbia no longer offered inspiration; he had to leave. His friends all knew it. In his long review of Popović's 1950 exhibition, Mihiz asked "where will Mića Popović go tomorrow? That can only be guessed."<sup>98</sup> Pavle Vasić, who noted Popović's uncommon openness to different styles in his "desire to find his own expression," had a suggestion: Popović "should be allowed to see European painting schools, the works of the great masters, in order to supplement his education, to broaden his artistic horizons."<sup>99</sup> Mihiz understood that Popović was singularly open to outside influences. Popović would in fact be a mercurial painter, changing styles abruptly through his fifty-year career. In retrospect, Lazar Trifunović would write that "in Popović's work there is no gradual development, logical advance or quiet maturing; changes were quick and staccato with the result that his painting gives the impression of constant search and moving forward, climbing high at some points and inevitably falling down at others."<sup>100</sup> Trifunović traces Popović's shifts: his contrary, challenging nature would provoke him to reject socialist realism (offering his "neorealism"); then to the tendency of Serbian painters to copy West European models he would respond with a return to the fresco (his cycle "The Village of Nepričava"); to "aestheticism" Popović offered abstract painting ("Of Fog, of Bones" and *informel*). Finally, when abstract painting was exhausted, he turned to the committed realism of "Scenes Painting." These herky-jerky switches would all occur as part of Popović's extended education, most of which took place outside of Serbia. Popović would soon leave for Europe, which for Serbs usually meant Paris.

Popović was not a provincial, which set him apart from Ćosić, whose travel was a product less of intellectual curiosity than professional necessity and confined to the communist bloc, and also Mihiz, who went to Paris in the early 1950s and spent several fruitful but lonely weeks.<sup>101</sup> Popović wished to be influenced by Paris. His first trip to France was in 1951, a three-month stay funded by a state stipend granted on the basis of the success of his 1950 show. After his formal stay in Paris, he continued on to Cairo to visit one of his wife's rela-

tives, and then Italy. That extension was paid for in part by the sale of his wife's heirloom diamond ring and some street paintings of Paris that he sold in Egypt.<sup>102</sup> Upon his return to Belgrade in 1951, Popović went to work on a new cycle of paintings, "The Village Nepričava," based on a stay in the village of that name, outside Valjevo.<sup>103</sup> In May, 1952, his exhibition opened in Belgrade. Popović was quoted by a Paris art journal saying that he "would like...to establish a link between old Serbian fresco-painting and contemporary art, to express the traditional soul of my people using modern means."<sup>104</sup> These seventeen paintings represented Popović's attempt to meld Serbian folklore with the tradition of the medieval fresco, and the cycle was eventually judged a failure. There is no question that "The Village of Nepričava" represented Popović's rejection of the models he had seen in Paris, but the hope that "The Village of Nepričava" would be the foundation of a real Serbian contribution to world art also missed the mark. Nonetheless, the paintings were shown in Paris thereafter and provided the impetus to his contract with Robert Hellebrandt of the Barbizon Gallery, which lasted until 1956.

Popović's next attempt was a cycle entitled "Of Fog, of Bones," which opened in February 1955 with fifty paintings. Edging ever closer to abstraction, these paintings retained some of the feel of the fresco, left over from "The Village of Nepričava." These were more complex paintings, which used a system of symbolic associations, and they were universal in theme and execution. Still, like "The Village of Nepričava," "Of Fog, of Bones" reflected the ongoing transition in Popović's work from figural painting to his eventual arrival as an abstract expressionist. Popović later wrote that his period of travel—primarily to Paris—turned out, in spite of his hopes, to be one of artistic discomfort, in which he refused to open up to Parisian influences, did not find his own style, made no living, and waited expectantly for his own professional arrival, in vain.<sup>105</sup> It was not until 1956, according to Popović, that he lost his arrogant expectation of success and began to paint without concern for his reputation or wealth.

In his book *Clashes and Harmonies* (Sudari i harmonije, 1954), Popović brought together letters, travel writings, and confident musings on modern art. They pertained to his travels in France, Egypt, and Italy, and are infused with optimism, openness, reflecting an animated encounter with a world he could not wait to meet and, in some

respects, bring back with him to Belgrade. By and large they are naive, even fatuous (“There is nothing easier for a Frenchman than to recognize a prostitute, and nothing more difficult for a foreigner”),<sup>106</sup> as he himself later acknowledged: “It was a pleasant, self-confident, impressionistic and superficial piece of writing.”<sup>107</sup> Reviewers disagreed: Petar Džadžić thought it was the best travelogue published in Yugoslavia, with occasionally brilliant prose. “If [Popović] doesn’t continue to write he will have a lot of reasons for regret...and he will not be the only one.”<sup>108</sup> It also offers a unique contemporary source for some of the important constants in Popović’s ideas, whether about painting or about political and social issues. Popović comes across as a person as concerned about social questions as political freedom and someone who is rather amused at his own “Yugoslavianness” as he travels the west.

“Patriotism is ignited by distance,” he writes.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps it was that distance that provoked his debate with an English cleric (on the voyage to Cairo) over the nature of “freedom.”<sup>110</sup> Popović’s companion asked whether there was freedom in Yugoslavia; he was shocked by Popović’s clipped negative response.<sup>111</sup> Met with bumbling disbelief, Popović continued, recalcitrant: “There is none, at least not in the sense that you understand it, but I have come from France where they do in fact have the kind you imagine, and I did not notice that they had solved the question of existence with any more success.” Englishman: “But sir, God created people to live in freedom!” Popović: “I agree, but tell me if God would agree that someone who does nothing should live in abundance, while someone else for all of his virtues and all of his sweat barely earns his daily bread?” Popović claimed to be more concerned with unemployment—“a true evil,” which, in conversation with this cleric, Popović obstinately maintained did not exist in Yugoslavia.<sup>112</sup>

In *Clashes and Harmonies*, Popović betrayed his usual conciliatory attitude towards socialist realism. “If it had not been mixed with an overly sugar-coated romanticism, it might have earned distinction as the style of the epoch.”<sup>113</sup> This time, in conversation with an Italian host, he noted that socialist realism had been replaced among his peers by a new “revolutionary principal—abstract art, and now they discover things discovered forty years ago.” At this point, he rejected abstraction: “Beauty and taste are relative,” he asserted. “The only power is in what’s real.”<sup>114</sup> Popović rather contemptuously placed abstract art



and socialist realism at opposite poles—but he held out more hope for the latter: “socialist realism, protected from the possibility of propagandistic deceit...probably coincides with the eternal pendulum of human inclinations and represents the authentic revolutionary future of painting.” Abstraction, on the other hand, “long ago ceased to be avant-garde...a tardy anticonservatism is in fact conservatism of the most primitive sort.”<sup>115</sup> Ironically, Popović’s greatest successes as a painter would come in the 1960s and 1970s via abstraction and then social realism.

While Popović pursued his goals as a cosmopolitan, outside of Serbia and in the universalist idiom of art, Ćosić remained a cultural and political introvert, rarely leaving Serbia. Ćosić records that the very reason he became a communist was local: he wished to eliminate the impoverishment of the village and to change the life of peasant women.<sup>116</sup> He once claimed that his highest ambition as he fought with the Partisans was to become the head of a collective farm after the war. This fixation with the village and the peasant commanded his attention both as a writer and as a public figure. Ćosić left ample evidence that he deeply revered the village, even while hating many of its attributes, and that his own devotion to communism must be understood in terms of his dedication to the transformation of village life; that even his self-proclaimed Yugoslavism was born in his understanding of how communism would reshape agrarian Serbia and Yugoslavia. Between 1945 and 1957, Ćosić served as people’s representative for three districts: his home region of Trstenik, then Župa, and finally Kopaonik. This position entailed regular visits to the districts. Three of these visits have been described—one in 1947, recorded later by Žika Stojković (who accompanied his friend on the trip), the second in 1955, and the third in 1958, both of which were recounted by Ćosić himself within a few months.<sup>117</sup> They reveal much about the young communist at the beginning of a writing career. When Stojković and Ćosić arrived in Velika Drenova in 1947 to visit Ćosić’s family, it was immediately apparent to Stojković that Ćosić felt a robust connection with the peasants of the region. Stojković noted how Ćosić “embarrassed the local government when he would show that he understood the ‘situation on the ground’ better than they assumed, and how well he knew the peasants who would come to him.”<sup>118</sup> Mića Popović later recalled that on a trip with Ćosić to Kopaonik in 1955 or 1956, “in the middle

of nowhere, Dobrica knew by name all of the peasants who lived in the settlements in the mountains, knew their families, their problems, knew what they owned, and shared in their hopes.”<sup>119</sup> One reason for Ćosić’s familiarity was the fact that he had spent his youth and the war years in the area. But Stojković and Popović believed that Ćosić was simply a compassionate person. Popović called it a “gift for sharing the fate of those near to him.”<sup>120</sup>

In his hopes and goals for the village, Ćosić said that he took his lead from Kardelj when the latter wrote that “the commune must become that social cell which will be most closely linked to the masses, in which people can express themselves most immediately.” He fused the communist meaning of “communal” to an older one that he learned in his own backyard: “mutual, just, equal, harmonious.” The two versions meshed for Ćosić. Above all, Ćosić saw the local commune as a building block to socialism. He ruminated in 1955 on how he would address the locals:

I will speak of people growing together and unifying in the commune, which will affirm all of the social and personal potential of the individual, so violence and force will become superfluous, so that democracy will replace the state, so that together they will be like the air that we breathe, something that is understood, which is here and is not [just] a goal, so that through the commune Yugoslavism will grow and the borders of republics will be erased, so that someday people will write: I am a Yugoslav from such and such commune...<sup>121</sup>

Ironically, words very much like those in the final phrase, “Yugoslavism will grow and the borders of republics will be erased...,” would get Ćosić into hot water with a Slovene writer in 1961. That conversation was directly related to the persistence of nationalism in Yugoslavia, so the words stood out. Here they were less remarkable. What emerges from Ćosić’s monologue is a communism in which national identities will become less relevant than the higher identification, Yugoslav, as a result of work on the communal level. Ćosić saw the building of socialism in Yugoslavia as a ground-up proposition.

At this local level, Ćosić’s struggle was the “long-term battle with backwardness, inertia, passions, politicization, bureaucratism, local

and localistic preoccupations, personal ambition, district and regional [ambitions].”<sup>122</sup> Ćosić could exhibit great hostility towards the peasantry—he once wrote that “a peasant in politics can only be a tyrant or an opportunist.”<sup>123</sup> He recorded approvingly one peasant’s desire that the letter “p” be “erased from the alphabet,” because “p” is the “first letter of the words ‘pussy [pizda],’ ‘friendship [priateljstvo],’ ‘money [para],’ and ‘protection [protekcija].’ All of man’s misfortunes begin with it.”<sup>124</sup> To combat these evils and these attitudes, Ćosić publicly wrote that he was “happy that we have come to a level in the development of democracy that allows more complete fulfillment of the political personality and the general personalities of all political workers both in the district and in the village.”<sup>125</sup> Privately, he noted in May 1953 that “for the rural people of Serbia to be happy, the peasantry must be destroyed. That means brutally and bloodily. Any progress must be fed and paid for in blood.”<sup>126</sup> But he was equally unsure of success in such a project: “I really truly do not know how we will make our peasants into socialists...”<sup>127</sup>

In 1958, Ćosić painted an idiosyncratic picture of one ideal communal worker, in this case, the district president. His name was Dušan Brdjanac, and he was not well-loved by those around him. He was too austere; he actually took notes at meetings; he refused to live in the house provided by the local government; he declined to take his yearly vacation; he did not talk much, and when he travelled around his village, he did so on foot. His co-workers described him as aggressive and unfair. Ćosić presented Brdjanac, whom he did not know personally until their meeting in the district, as something unexpected but ideal in a communist commune leader. As Ćosić makes his rounds of the local villages, seeking out corruption and incompetence, he listens “to such ‘accusations’ against the president, and I am satisfied and astounded, bitter, joyful, sad, I beg for dissatisfaction and complaints about him, I want to hear a different attack and other criticism, I would like to catch him in a misdeed...”<sup>128</sup> But Ćosić does not catch him—instead, he can only admire this new communist person, this village leader who disdains and rejects privilege, this bureaucrat who refuses to act like a bureaucrat. People like Brdjanac convinced Ćosić that communists could, even should, begin their struggle on the bottom rung of society’s ladder, in the village, with the peasant. Interestingly, when Ćosić found himself twenty years later in his struggle against

Titoism, he would condemn it for bureaucratism, corruption, privilege. Those Serbian communists whom Ćosić viewed as Tito's lackeys he would condemn as typical primitive village headmen, the types that Brdjanac refused to emulate. In fact, he would later argue that the evil of the Serbian peasantry was reflected in the character Prince Miloš Obrenović, whom Ćosić would use as a symbol of his "tyrant" and "opportunist," and extend as a metaphor for Serbian leaders in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ćosić's second novel, *Roots* (Koreni), appeared in 1954, and dealt with the type of village that Ćosić represented. It won the first *NIN* award for novel of the year for 1954. Radically different in form than the didactic and transparent *Far Away is the Sun*, it tackled the complex topic of the Serbian patriarchal village as it confronted modernity in the 1890s. Consciously adopting a "Faulknerian" approach,<sup>129</sup> Ćosić began with *Roots* his twelve-volume saga of the Katić family of Prerovo, a fictitious village in the Morava River valley, the region of Ćosić's birth and upbringing. In *Roots*, Ćosić attempted to counter what he considered to be the prevailing treatment of the Serbian village in earlier Serbian literature: as a scene of nostalgia for patriarchal times past and of a fear of the future.<sup>130</sup> More explicitly, he wished to "return to the nineteenth century to find the roots of our passions, collapses, and unrest." He chose to examine peasant politics, in the form of those who supported the Radical party, whose origins were in peasant discontent with Serbia's still-young government: "that peasant revolutionary movement, [which was] anti-bureaucratic, anti-patronage, anti-miserly in the social, cultural, and political life of Serbia at the turn of the twentieth century."<sup>131</sup> *Roots* would harshly critique that anti-bureaucratic movement, which Ćosić would conclude was too provincial and too dependent on its leading personalities, corrupted by power, for a Serbia becoming modern. With *Roots*, Ćosić began a life-long project which would tragically conclude with his misguided support for Slobodan Milošević's "anti-bureaucratic revolution" in the late 1980s.

*Roots* introduces Ćosić's readers to the Katić family, headed by Ćim Katić. Ćim's past is one possible source of the title of the novel, as he really has no roots as such. He is the son of Kata Katić, who had been married to Vasilije Katić, a Serb who was killed in raids against the Turks. After Vasilije's death, Kata takes in an itinerant worker

named "Luka," who has no last name but is called "Došljak," meaning "newcomer." Aćim is Luka Došljak's son, but when Aćim enters the army, Kata insists that the boy be registered as Aćim Katić, to avoid the stigma of carrying the stranger's emblematic name. Aćim's attempts to overcome his own feeling of rootlessness would fire his commanding physical and emotional presence throughout the novel. *Koreni* has been described as a novel of physical power rather than emotional force, and to the extent that the characters are all drawn with a dynamic vitality, this is an accurate characterization. But it is also a novel of constant internal dialogues and stream-of-consciousness mental harangues in which the real tensions of the novel are revealed. In this and in its Yoknapatawpha-like setting of Prerovo, it comes closest to the Faulknerian model.

Those tensions involve the fates of Aćim's two sons, Djordje and Vukašin. They are the source of two different types of frustration felt by the old man: Djordje, the son who was to remain at home and attend to the family holdings, is unable to father children. Even in this patriarchal society in which the woman would ordinarily be blamed pro-forma for this failure, Djordje is considered by all to be the likely weakness in the line. Pathetic in the eyes of his father, Djordje spends his life travelling between Prerovo, Belgrade, and Budapest, trading in pigs and cattle. All he has to show for it is a growing pile of useless gold ducats, which do nothing to sooth the emptiness he feels due to the attention his father pays to Vukašin. For his part, Vukašin has been groomed since his birth to be the schooled gentleman who will carry forward his father's political interests in the Serbian capital of Belgrade following his years of education in Paris. But Vukašin rejects his father's politics (Aćim is a leader of the Radical party in their district, a veteran of the Timok rebellion, and a dyed-in-the-wool opponent of the Obrenović regime), marries a daughter of a prominent Liberal, and goes to Belgrade to carry out his own war against the "hajduk" politics of his father and other divisive Serbian political leaders.

The very title of the novel, *Roots*, can be variously construed. The novel could be describing the "roots" of modern Serbia's various dilemmas, as Ćosić himself asserted; but the roots could be familial (Aćim describes himself as the true "roots and trunk" of his family<sup>132</sup>). Ironically, the "real" roots portrayed in this novel do not even exist: the main characters *seek* roots that they do not feel they actually pos-

sess. While Aćim flees his own father's name (Došljak, the very essence of rootlessness), Djordje's wife Simka eventually gives birth to a son, Adam, who is actually fathered by Djordje's servant, Tola Dačić. Simka contrived to sleep with Tola to overcome her own husband's impotence and assure her ability to remain in the family household. Her success comes at high price: everyone suspects that Djordje is not the father, and his reputation suffers; Aćim will not have anything to do with the child. But six years later, both Adam and Simka lie gravely ill, and she and Djordje come to a final reckoning that allows Djordje to overcome his own shame and embrace his child. Aćim follows suit. Simka dies of her illness; Adam becomes the extension of a family line that began in the anonymity of Luka Došljak's arrival and now continues via the myth of his own Katić birth. All in all, Ćosić tells the reader that the Katićes' situation and surroundings, representative of the Serbian peasant of the late nineteenth century, are paradigmatic for a Serbia which is new, not established, cut through with tensions and conflicting goals, but striving to sink the roots that only their own mythology asserts that they actually have.

The ignoble nature of Adam's conception accurately reflects what can only be described as a novel seeped in a tawdry, occasionally sordid reality. The Serbian village for Ćosić becomes a place where Aćim would beat his wife with a wet cord while she whined, naked, "like only some newborn animal could,"<sup>133</sup> because she could no longer bear children. It is a place where a young Djordje could be introduced to the world of the flesh by his own aunt, Višnja, in the barn<sup>134</sup>; where "men's bones are stronger thanks to past slaughter"<sup>135</sup>; where Djordje whispers to Simka as she slumbers that she should sleep with Tola in order to bear him a son<sup>136</sup>; where Djordje could demand of his servant, Tola, that he give Djordje his fourth-born son Aleksa should Adam die<sup>137</sup>; where a peasant uprising can break out as a result of one local headman's spite and anger over his son's unacceptable wedding.<sup>138</sup> Ultimately, though, these are but occasional commentary on village life. Ćosić's real critique, the real point of the novel, is that peasant localisms could poison the future of Serbia. Here, Aćim's conflict with his son Vukašin takes center stage.

Aćim Katić had a plan for his children. Djordje, the firstborn, would handle the business. But Vukašin had been born with great difficulty. The priest who christened him told Aćim to "send this one

to school. Nothing will come of him. He barely entered this world... Mothers have trouble giving birth to thinkers and book readers.”<sup>139</sup> So Vukašin was schooled, all the way through university in Paris, in the expectation that he would carry on Ćim’s legacy in politics. While Ćim would remain a local Radical party leader and skupština representative, Vukašin would go to Belgrade, become minister of the interior, and make laws and keep order. Ćim:

When Vukašin takes the reins [in Belgrade], he will hand over my seat to Djordje, with my help and my people they have to elect him. Simka will bear me grandchildren, and I will care for them, their surname will not be Katić, my grandchildren will be named Ćimović, I will read the newspapers and calmly await my death... and my father was a miller and a servant. A leaf on the roadway. Luka Došljak...<sup>140</sup>

Ćim’s plan is foiled by Vukašin’s high-mindedness. Vukašin comes back to Belgrade from Paris, but does not return to his birthplace for three years. When he finally does reappear, it is to tell his father that he plans to marry the daughter of one of Ćim’s political enemies, and that he will not become a Radical tribune as Ćim had been.

I will not enter into any sort of party. I will not let my life and my abilities be exhausted in radical politicking ....The people do not have anything as a result of your constitutions and your freedom. After the Turks, the people never sought liberty. They only sought bread. And you, radicals, tricked them into thinking that the constitution is bread...Nation, constitution, bread, all of those are just excuses to come to power. More than a few of my friends and those who finished some school before me have fallen into our, no, your, political hajdukery. Who has use for that?<sup>141</sup>

Vukašin the idealist would become the hero of Ćosić’s multivolume saga of the Katićes, always outside, always the moral voice, never allowing himself to be sullied by day to day politicking, unless the fate of the nation were in doubt. Ćim puts the final touches on this village morality play when he turns to Adam as his last hope. After the authorities refuse to jail or kill him for an attempt on the life of the

hated King Milan, Aćim returns to a sick Adam. "They didn't [even] want to kill me. No one fears me anymore. But you will grow up. I still have you, even if you are not mine. You are not my blood, but you have my surname. That is little. That is much. I will teach you to hate them."<sup>142</sup>

## TRANSITIONS

Regardless of Ćosić's fixation on rural Serbia, he did participate actively in literary struggles as a modernist. He worked closely with a journal that helped define both the literature and politics of the era: *Nova misao*, the journal inspired and founded by Milovan Djilas in 1953 to give creative voice to the *borba mišljenja* proclaimed by the party in the wake of the Tito–Stalin split.<sup>143</sup> Along with Djilas and Ćosić, an eclectic crew staffed the editorial board: Oskar Davičo, the surrealist; Miroslav Krleža, the Croatian novelist; Milan Bogdanović, the Marxist critic; Bora Drenovac, Ćosić's boss on Serbian agitprop; and Mihailo Lalić, the Montenegrin novelist, along with several others. *Nova misao* (New Thought) reflected the outer limits of permissiveness at the time, pushed by Djilas' growing impatience with the reform that he expected and demanded in the wake of the 1952 Sixth LCY Congress. Later Djilas was careful to delimit the role of *Nova misao*: "Neither *Nova misao* nor its associated groups set out to be a parallel or opposition center, nor did they become such. They were...an informal party grouping, arising from democratic trends..."<sup>144</sup> When Djilas fell in January 1954, his collaborators on *Nova misao* were instantly suspect in the eyes of the party. Ćosić, as a member of the board of *Nova misao*, could not escape that suspicion, although he did survive it.

Ćosić never publicly defended Djilas or aired his thoughts on the events surrounding Djilas' fall. But in his diary, he allowed that the crisis had affected him deeply. Djilas had been for him "the leader of the ideological struggle against Stalinism," which was a good thing, and the "best liked figure in the party after Tito."<sup>145</sup> Although they were not friends, Ćosić also felt the tug of loyalty to Djilas, since the latter had "indebted [Ćosić] with his confidence in having him with him on the editorial board of *Nova misao*, the most reputable journal in the country."<sup>146</sup> When the crisis came, he was amazed that "Djilas, the inspiration, imagination...the temperament of the revolution, [was]



really being smothered..."<sup>147</sup> Others were similarly shaken; Davičo, for instance, apparently threatened suicide, a threat that Ćosić took seriously. For Ćosić, Djilas' initiatives had been the natural continuation of developments in Yugoslavia following the break with Stalin; Djilas had been for many the most convincing guarantee that the *borba mišljenja*, the symbol of growing openness in Yugoslavia, would continue. With his fall, Djilas' followers wondered whether a return to Stalinism approached. The uncertainty of the situation also shook Ćosić. To his diary, he allowed that "the time before 1948 was wonderful...when I wasn't ambivalent, I felt free to be critical."<sup>148</sup> Now, he worried about the direction of the revolution, and began to feel more than a little paranoid.<sup>149</sup>

Ćosić has claimed that he came close to being forced out of the party in April, during the Third Congress of the League of Communists of Serbia, which spent most of its time addressing Djilasism in Serbia. While the lead speakers at the congress called for tolerance of divergent opinions, they also warned of foreign influences and that ageless cipher, decadence. Ćosić, however, spoke remarkably openly about the need for true cultural pluralism.<sup>150</sup> He rejected "exclusivism in relation to the form of artistic expression," and asserted that the "League of Communists and individual communists need not a priori attack expression, or a priori fight for some kind of realism."<sup>151</sup> These were conspicuous words, given the timing, and Ćosić was momentarily left dangling by his comrades, who predicted that he would be kicked out of the party for having uttered them. Edvard Kardelj saved him more or less by accident the next day, when he endorsed tolerance of ideological diversity—within limits, as always—and Ćosić thereby appeared less intransigent.<sup>152</sup>

The Djilas crisis put Mihiz in a bad place as well. Nobody doubted that Mihiz played favorites. Nobody contested the status of some of his pet authors: Ivo Andrić, for instance, did not need Mihiz to make his reputation. But Mihiz stood up for Miodrag Pavlović and Vasko Popa, the two poets most often attributed now with having brought Serbian poetry into the modern age, at a time when other critics lambasted them.<sup>153</sup> He also favored the work of Mihailo Lalić, Antonije Isaković, Dobrica Ćosić, and Oskar Davičo, but their reputations were either already assured or bound to be made. The fact that he would defend "his" writers is well-documented, however. One case, involv-

ing his treatment of Davičo's book-length poem entitled *A Man's Man* (*Čovekov čovek*), got Mihiz into political trouble.<sup>154</sup> Davičo's collection of poems dealt with the thoughts and reactions of one revolutionary fighter. The author was one of the most active members of the *Nova misao* collective. It was January 1954, and the Djilas affair loomed. Mihiz was already associated with *Nova misao*,<sup>155</sup> although he and Djilas were not yet bound by friendship—that could not have happened while Djilas still reigned at the top of the Yugoslav communist cultural hierarchy.

Mihiz found Davičo's poetry to be brilliant, although he also found fault with its "lack of economy." But the problem was not with his view of the poem so much as his presumed association with the author and the ideas of the author's perceived patron, Milovan Djilas. When a hostile but superficial review of Davičo's work by Tanasije Mladenović appeared in *Književne novine* a month later (and two weeks following the Third Plenum, at which Djilas was disgraced), Mihiz responded in the same venue that Mladenović had not even tried to understand the poem and that his article "was not literary criticism, it is a political pamphlet of a very weak sort," and that Zhdanovites "wrote incomparably better."<sup>156</sup> Mihiz, of course, was right: Davičo was being treated as an ideological enemy and not as a writer.

Mihiz might have survived the Davičo episode, which was undoubtedly a product of his own spite in addition to artistic conviction, had he not also begun a personal relationship with Djilas at precisely the moment of Djilas's fall. Mihiz's wife Milica had been giving private English lessons to Djilas at the time of his disgrace. After the plenum, which witnessed Djilas's rather abject admission of his ideological transgressions, Mihiz invited himself into Djilas's life: "I know you're lonely. I'm not joining the boycott, and I think that a visit from me will not be unwelcome."<sup>157</sup> What followed was a lifelong, albeit oft-interrupted, friendship that brought Djilas into contact with not only Mihiz, but Mića Popović and Žika Stojković as well. Ćosić believed that their initial contact was a result of the fact that Mihiz and Stojković, "respectable moralistic stylists, side with the victim," but also that for them their friendship with Djilas reflected their "arrogance and [desire for] revenge."<sup>158</sup> Ćosić expressed pity that Djilas had to make friends with those anticommunists: "he abjectly...takes to them the revolution's dirty laundry." Mihiz, who "inspired [Djilas]

with his paradoxes,” began to wear on Ćosić, his glee at the party’s embarrassment apparently too much for Ćosić to take: “last night I had to keep quiet during Mihiz’s reactionary rants...”<sup>159</sup>

One result of Mihiz’s flirtation with Djilas was his removal from the staff of *NIN*. Sometime between 1954 and 1956,<sup>160</sup> he was asked to resign, which he did; he was then given the position of librarian of the Matica srpska in Novi Sad. Ćosić takes credit for providing Mihiz with this parachute, but has noted the absurdity of Mihiz, a drinking, gambling bohemian, as librarian.<sup>161</sup> Mihiz writes that his last piece for *NIN* was his review of Ćosić’s *Roots*.<sup>162</sup> Forbidden for a short while to publish, that right was returned to him in exchange for a promise not to visit Djilas, a promise that he gave with reluctance.<sup>163</sup> Stefan Doronjski, his school friend from Sremski karlovci, now a ranking communist, took care of all of the details from the party side. Mihiz is said to have accepted his changed circumstances with his typical resignation, mingled with some anger: “‘We are moving to Novi Sad,’ explains Mihiz, with a trembling and tight voice, beneath which one felt bitterness and resistance. ‘We have decided,’ he continues, and then adds ironically, ‘Naturally—voluntarily!’ ... ‘We are moving to Novi Sad; what’s strange about that?’”<sup>164</sup> Publicly, however, Mihiz betrayed more enthusiasm. In a 1956 farewell piece in *NIN*, he wrote of the novelty of Novi Sad, a city “I know so little about.” He expressed his joy at having found a reason to love it: the theater competition known as the Sterijino pozorje, held yearly there. Novi Sad and the Sterijino pozorje would open up an entirely new and fruitful phase of his life.

For all intents and purposes, Mihiz’s career as “critic of the moment” ended then, although he did publish one piece in 1957 in *Politika* that served as his farewell to the genre: it was entitled “Occultism.”<sup>165</sup> In it, Mihiz bemoaned the fact that, while the battle for free expression had been won, Serbian writers had become overly complex, as though the intricacy of one’s expression hid some fundamental profundity. He later reminisced that after 1956, Serbian literature “fell into obscurantism and occultism. That was the moment when it seemed to me that our literature became boring.” Mihiz, who apparently hated to write,<sup>166</sup> also speculated that he quit writing criticism because “I had probably already become worn out.” He felt that he had outlived his readership: “for each generation it is better for that work to be done by a person of that generation.”<sup>167</sup>

After retiring from *NIN* and from professional literary criticism, Mihiz was often given that sort of faint praise that true practitioners reserve for the glib dilettante—he was well-read but superficial, he was unschooled in theory but was enthusiastic, he could turn a phrase but had few original ideas.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, fellow critics often renewed the accusation of favoritism.<sup>169</sup> Many of these reproaches were deserved, but one senses that when all was said and done, Mihiz was appreciated by the reading public for what he was—a deeply perceptive fellow reader whose judgment novices could trust. Soja Jovanović, a Belgrade theater director, has asserted that “he was a person who knew meaningful people when he saw them.” According to Jovanović (who exaggerated), the reputations of Desanka Maksimović, Branko Ćopić, Dušan Radović, and others were made not because Mihiz praised them, but because he discovered them.<sup>170</sup> Others record his role more acerbically: in a biting critique of Dobrica Ćosić and Antonije Isaković, Mladen Markov recently asserted that “the writers of their books were Oskar Davičo and Borislav Mihajlović.”<sup>171</sup> Danilo Stojković, in a slam of the Serbian Academy, argued that Mihiz, whose own literary production was comparatively small, deserved a place in the Academy if only for the writers he nurtured. (Mihiz never did make it into the Academy.) Pavle Ugrinov has written that Mihiz was “an amateur, smitten, in the best sense of the word....He was just a ‘professional’ babbler, a so-called ‘oral literary critic’....[but] the most influential critic, because nothing is as effective as word of mouth retelling, especially in an environment in which scandalously few read...”<sup>172</sup>

Ugrinov saw something more than exhaustion behind Mihiz’s withdrawal.

Appearing to have both feet in art and aesthetics, and not exactly *avante-garde* but predominantly traditional, Mihiz in fact stood most firmly in cultural politics and politics itself, and here operated critically, more violently than in literature, and also irreconcilably. Because he was in any case predominantly a critical soul. Gradually he narrowed the circle of artistic and widened the circle of political personalities with whom he was seen.<sup>173</sup>

Ugrinov believed that Mihiz’s banishment to Novi Sad liberated him:

In reality, that was the moment, it seemed to me, when Mihiz already slowly began to turn his back on literary criticism and literature and ever more gave in to politics and public life of that type....As though his brilliant critical beginning in *NIN* was only an introduction to a more versatile public performance. From one sphere he passed into another wider sphere; from one which he fit into another which he fit even better. Better said: a fulfillment. He was, perhaps, born to it.<sup>174</sup>

The "it" was politics and public life; if Ugrinov is right, it would nonetheless be several years before Mihiz fulfilled that public promise.

Popović was closer to fulfilling his own promise. In May 1956, he and his wife Vera stayed for six months in a cottage on the island of Brehat, off the Atlantic coast of France.<sup>175</sup> There he pondered his future. Should he "do away with symbolic expression and explore pictorial values more deeply," or "reduce the painting to pure symbol and free himself of that almost pathological fear of down-to-earth painting?"<sup>176</sup> Popović would choose to abandon both symbol and figure and adopt one of the varieties of abstract expressionism produced in the west, *art informel*. Demanding attention to materials and their means of application rather than the forms produced, relying on the physicality of the painter rather than his precision, *informel* responded to the sense of alienation felt by its adherents. For Popović, *informel* would be the first form of painting that he would fully embrace, and it would provide him with his first unqualified successes. It ended Popović's period of searching, mostly outside of Serbia or Yugoslavia, for an idiom that responded fully to his fear of figural painting, which he would later describe as a fear of the requirements of "pure art." There is irony in the fact that he finally settled on an abstract style, given his earlier rejection of abstraction as exhausted; but then, in that same breath he had condemned socialist realism (somewhat less categorically than abstraction), and he would return to a social realist style after 1968. Differing from Ćosić and Mihiz in his openness to foreign forms and in his desire to probe his own psyche, Popović's search took him outside of his own culture: whereas Mihiz merely tolerated his sojourn in Paris in the early 1950s, and would focus his energies entirely on questions pertaining to Serbian culture, Popović tested Serbian or Yugoslav

themes, failed, and fled to the west, to cosmopolitan places and a style developed outside of Yugoslavia. And, unlike Ćosić, whose career was devoted to a virtually global project of modernization, the perfection of mankind, Popović's project was personal and represented a flight from social engagement: *informel* was, for Popović, an escape to the interior. This escape would consume most of his 1960s. But where Mihiz's situation had changed abruptly (ultimately for the better) and Popović had begun to find his feet by 1956, Ćosić would endure the early signs of disillusionment at the same time.

## NOTES

- 1 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 77–79.
- 2 Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete*, 250.
- 3 Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete*, 162.
- 4 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 77.
- 5 Pavle Vasić, "Prva samostalna izložba," in *Politika* (September 28, 1950) 4. Ješa Denegri (*Pedesete*, 36) calls it the first independent show of an artist of the postwar generation, an assertion that depends on one's definition of the postwar generation. There were two other one-man shows, and one which featured two painters: see *Nadrealizam socijalna umetnost*, 72. Popović himself has described his as the first one-man show after the war; Mića Popović and Hans Klunker, *Mića Popović* (London: Flint River, 1989) 37.
- 6 Protić, *Nojeva barka*, v. 1, 321.
- 7 Mića Popović, "Predgovor katalogu izložbe" in Lazar Trifunović, editor, *Srpska likovna kritika: Izbor* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1967) 479–87.
- 8 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 47.
- 9 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 47.
- 10 See Mića Popović, *Sudari i harmonije* (Novi Sad: Bratstvo i jedinstvo, 1954) 45–46.
- 11 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 57.
- 12 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 48.
- 13 Popović, "Predgovor," 479–80.
- 14 Popović, "Predgovor," 481.
- 15 Popović, "Predgovor," 485.
- 16 Popović, "Predgovor," 482.
- 17 "Otvorena je izložba slika Miće Popovića," in *Politika* (September 25, 1950) 4.

- 18 Miodrag Protić, *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1970) 393.
- 19 Borislav Mihajlović, *Ogledi* (Belgrade: Novo pokoljenje, 1951) 219.
- 20 Protić, *Nojeva barka*, v. 1, 285.
- 21 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 57.
- 22 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 20.
- 23 Others have said that Mitra Mitrović, Djilas's first wife and another force in Serbian cultural politics, inspired *NIN*'s founding; Milovan Djilas, "NIN treba da se čuva," *NIN* (April 19, 1991) 49.
- 24 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 20.
- 25 Author's interview with Dobrica Ćosić, July 29, 2002.
- 26 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 32.
- 27 Whereas Mihiz says he lost his job after Djilas' fall, and his official biography says he worked in *NIN* until 1954, he regularly reviewed in *NIN* until 1956.
- 28 Borislav Mihajlović, "Novinama reč mržnje i ljubavi," in Mihajlović, *Književni razgovori*, 10.
- 29 Borislav Mihajlović, "[Odgovor na anketno pitanje o književnim uticajima]," in Mihajlović, *Književni razgovori*, 14–16.
- 30 Mihajlović, "[Odgovor...]," 16.
- 31 On Matoš in English, see Eugene E. Pantzer, *Antun Gustav Matoš* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981).
- 32 Quoted in Pantzer, *Antun Gustav Matoš*, 65–66.
- 33 Borislav Mihajlović, "Odronjeni bregovi," in Mihajlović, *Književni razgovori*, 33.
- 34 Borislav Mihajlović, "Književni razgovori," in Borislav Mihajlović, *Od istog čitaoca* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1956) 161.
- 35 Mihajlović, "Književni razgovori," 169.
- 36 Mihajlović, "Književni razgovori," 160.
- 37 Mihajlović, "Književni razgovori," 165–66.
- 38 On this meeting, see Peković, *Ni rat, ni mir*, 195–213; for a less formal contemporary view, see Stanislav Vinaver, "Plenum književnika 1954. godine," in Stanislav Vinaver, *Beogradsko ogledalo*, (Belgrade: Slovo ljubve, 1977) 213–17.
- 39 Vinaver's columns under the title "Beogradsko ogledalo" were collected in *Beogradsko ogledalo*. Scheduled speakers included Krleža, Josip Vidmar, Zoran Mišić, Marko Ristić, Ervin Šinko, Marin Franičević, Erih Koš, Oto Bihalji Marin, Janez Menart, Slobodan Novak, and Bora Pavlović; commentary was offered by Mihiz, Milan Bogdanović, Eli Finci, Mihailo Lalić, Boris Zihlerl, Petar Šegedin, and Vinaver. See *NIN* (Belgrade) November 14 and 21, 1954. Vinaver, much older than Mihiz, seems to have shared his temperament; he wrote for *Republika* between 1950 and 1955; see Vinaver, "Plenum književnika 1954. godine," 213–17.
- 40 Miroslav Krleža, "Referat na plenumu saveza književnika," in Krleža, *Eseji*, 61–83.

- 41 Borislav Mihajlović, "Reč u diskusiji na izvanrednom plenumu Saveza književnika Jugoslavije 1954. godine," in Mihajlović, *Književni razgovori*, 34–39.
- 42 Mihajlović, "Reč u diskusiji," 36–37.
- 43 Ćosić agreed, by 1951: "Milan Bogdanović is ruined as a writer...That professor of literature at the university has totally lost the habit of reading books." Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 17.
- 44 Vinaver, "Plenum književnika 1954. godine," 214.
- 45 Mihajlović, "Reč u diskusiji," 37.
- 46 In these comments, he only reinforced similar remarks made in his article "Književni razgovori," described above. Mihajlović, "Reč na diskusiji," 37.
- 47 Mihajlović, "Reč na diskusiji," 39.
- 48 Mihajlović, "Reč na diskusiji," 39.
- 49 "Atelje 212," *NIN* (Belgrade) January 30, 1955, 8.
- 50 "Atelje 212," 8.
- 51 On Atelje 212, see Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1994), 31–33. For the Belgrade Drama Theater, see Stojković, "Okolo," 336; also Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 35–36.
- 52 (No author) "Volim komade s pevanjem i pucanjem" in *Blic* (Belgrade) June 27, 2000 (no page number).
- 53 (No author) "Volim komade s pevanjem i pucanjem," (no page number).
- 54 Stojković, "Okolo," 336.
- 55 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 55.
- 56 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 55.
- 57 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 16.
- 58 Zoran Žujović, "Knjiga o ljudima Rasine," *Politika* (Belgrade) July 8, 1951, 6.
- 59 Ćosić's bibliography, published in the *Godišnjak Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti* v. 84 (1977) 315–22, shows that it was published in nineteen languages by 1977.
- 60 Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 152.
- 61 All citations will be from the 1966 edition of *Daleko je sunce* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966).
- 62 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 67.
- 63 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 29.
- 64 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 17.
- 65 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 20.
- 66 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 113.
- 67 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 117.
- 68 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 127.
- 69 Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 152–4.
- 70 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 155–56.
- 71 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 79–80.



- 72 Ćosić, *Daleko je sunce*, 189.
- 73 Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, 60.
- 74 See Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–56* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) 45–74.
- 75 Marko Ristić, *Književna politika: Članci i pamfleti* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1952); Marko Ristić, *Prostor-Vreme: Eseji i članci* (Zagreb: Zora, 1952).
- 76 Ristić, *Književna politika* 2d ed. (Belgrade: Rad, 1979) 9. All citations for this section will be from the 1979 edition.
- 77 Ristić, *Književna politika*, 10.
- 78 Mihajlović, *Od istog čitaoca*, 111. The review, entitled “An Article With a Bit of a Pamphlet: On a Book of Pamphlets and Articles” was published in *NIN* in April 1952.
- 79 Mihajlović, *Od istog čitaoca*, 112. Vladislav Petković Dis was a turn-of-the-century Serbian poet.
- 80 Mihajlović, *Od istog čitaoca*, 115.
- 81 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 36. Peković describes Majstorović’s review as a pure response to the tenuous nature of literary politics in 1952 (*Ni rat, ni mir*, 135–137); Mihiz’s recollection is that Majstorović wanted to publish Mihiz’s review, but needed to “attack Mihiz sharply at the same time.”
- 82 This review appeared under the title “Marko Ristić: ‘Prostor-Vreme’” in November 1952 in *NIN*; Mihajlović, *Od istog čitaoca*, 116–122.
- 83 Mihiz, *Od istog čitaoca*, 117, 122.
- 84 Predrag Palavestra found Ristić’s work to be brilliant. Zoran Mišić believed that Ristić was “the Dositej of an irrational idea and the codifier of anti-dogmatic positions” (a positive appraisal). Palavestra, *Posleratna srpska književnost*, 54–58; Mišić is quoted in Peković, *Ni rat ni mir*, 136.
- 85 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 37–38.
- 86 Milivoj Nenin, “Ništa novo, a neponovljivo,” in Vladeta Janković and Milan Janković, eds. *Drugi o Mihizu* (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 1998) 70.
- 87 Marko Ristić, “Tri mrtvih pesnika,” in Hanifa Kapidžić-Osmanagić, editor, *Kritički radovi Marka Ristića* (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1987) 313–407.
- 88 D. Adamović, “Moze se reći da u tim književnim sferama nikad nijedna bitka nije definitivno dobijena, ali ni izgubljena,” *NIN* (Belgrade) February 28, 1954, p. 8.
- 89 Ristić, “Tri mrtvih pesnika,” 315.
- 90 Ristić, “Tri mrtvih pesnika,” 360–61.
- 91 Ristić, “Tri mrtvih pesnika,” 317.
- 92 Ristić, “Tri mrtvih pesnika,” 321.
- 93 Ristić, “Tri mrtvih pesnika,” 325.
- 94 Borislav Mihajlović, “Miloš: Poslednja Čarnojevićeva seoba,” in Borislav Mihajlović, *Portreti* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1988) 181.
- 95 Borislav Mihajlović, “Pesnik,” in Mihajlović, *Portreti*, 180.
- 96 “Razgovor o romanu ‘Seobe’ Miloša Crnjanskog” in *Delo* (Belgrade) January 1963, 7.

- 97 "Razgovor," 25.
- 98 Mihajlović, *Ogledi*, 229.
- 99 Vasić, "Prva samostalna izložba," 4.
- 100 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 147.
- 101 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 69–112.
- 102 Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 40.
- 103 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 47.
- 104 "Francuzi o slikarstvu Miće Popovića," *Politika* (Belgrade) May 29, 1953, 4.
- 105 Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 42–50.
- 106 Popović, *Sudari i harmonije*, 106.
- 107 Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 47.
- 108 Petar Džadžić, "Mića Popović: 'Sudari i harmonije,'" in *NIN* (Belgrade) December 26, 1954, p. 9.
- 109 Popović, *Sudari i harmonije*, 15.
- 110 Popović, *Sudari i harmonije*, 19–21.
- 111 So was the Ideological Commission of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez komunista Jugoslavije, SKJ; the post-split name of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia). It met in February 1956, and Popović's comment drew the ire of Veljko Vlahović: "He talks about the need for freedom in our country and announces that in our country there is no freedom, and he does not expand about where we haven't got it. And such things are published here..." Arhiv Jugoslavije, Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Jugoslavije [hereafter AJ, CK-SKJ] Ideološka komisija, "Zapisnik za sastanka Ideološke komisije CK Jugoslavije na dan 3.II.1956 godine," 63.
- 112 Popović, *Sudari i harmonije*, 20; quote from p. 41.
- 113 Popović, *Sudari i harmonije*, 45.
- 114 Popović, *Sudari i harmonije*, 46.
- 115 Popović, *Sudari i harmonije*, 153.
- 116 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 17.
- 117 Stojković, "Okolo," 336–40; Dobrica Ćosić, "Komuna, stara i nova reč," in *Delo* v. 1, no. 2 (April 1955) 183–94. The 1957 trip is documented in Dobrica Ćosić, "Predsednik," in *Prilike*, v.2 of *Akcije* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966) 17–23.
- 118 Stojković, "Okolo," 337.
- 119 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 55.
- 120 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 55.
- 121 Ćosić, "Komuna, stara i nova reč," 189.
- 122 Ćosić, "Komuna, stara i nova reč," 189.
- 123 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 24.
- 124 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 25.
- 125 Ćosić, "Komuna, stara i nova reč," 190.
- 126 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 33–34.

- 127 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 35.
- 128 Ćosić, “Predsednik,” 21.
- 129 In 1954, after *Roots*’ publication, Ćosić said that he had been influenced by Freud, Jung, and Adler in its composition, but that “perhaps literature, such as Faulkner, is more essentially present in *Roots* than is psychology as a science”; from an interview in *Književne novine* (December 2, 1954), quoted in Vukašin Stanisavljević, *Koreni Dobrice Ćosića* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1982) 14. In *Time of Power* (Vreme vlasti, 1996), Ćosić inserts himself into the Katić story and comments that his first novel had been inspired by Faulker.
- 130 Stanisavljević, *Koreni Dobrice Ćosića*, 12–13.
- 131 Stanisavljević, *Koreni Dobrice Ćosića*, 10–11.
- 132 Dobrica Ćosić, *Koreni* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966) 110.
- 133 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 226.
- 134 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 82.
- 135 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 10.
- 136 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 169.
- 137 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 195.
- 138 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 125.
- 139 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 190.
- 140 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 31.
- 141 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 46–47.
- 142 Ćosić, *Koreni*, 263.
- 143 Peković, *Ni rat ni mir*, 157 ff.; Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, 328–30.
- 144 Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, 330.
- 145 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 41.
- 146 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 41.
- 147 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 39.
- 148 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 46–47.
- 149 He was interviewed by party committees on several occasions in 1954, and also apparently followed by UDBa agents. See Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 107–109.
- 150 For a discussion of the Third Congress, see Marković, *Beograd*, 330–32, and Peković, *Ni rat ni mir*, 190–93.
- 151 Cited in Marković, *Beograd*, 331.
- 152 There is some irony to the fact that Kardelj saved Ćosić’s skin, however circumstantially, since by the 1980s Kardelj would become Ćosić’s most loathed Yugoslav communist after Tito.
- 153 While Mihiz and Mišić praised Pavlović, others, like Zoran Gavrilović, said that “all you needed to know about Pavlović is that he has nothing to say.” Peković, *Ni rat, ni mir*, 137.
- 154 Boris Mihajlović, “Čovekov čovek,” in *NIN* (Belgrade) January 1, 1954, 4.
- 155 Mihiz’s article “Odrongjeni bregovi,” published in *NIN* in November 1953, praised the growth of tolerance within party circles of divergent

- opinion; it was interpreted by many to be an endorsement of *Nova misao*; see Peković, *Ni rat ni mir*, 163, in which the author describes Predrag Palavestra's attack on Mihiz. "Odronjeni bregovi" can be found in Mihajlović, *Od istog čitaoca*, 198–203.
- 156 The story of Davičo's *A Man's Man* and the crisis it provoked are in Peković, *Ni rat ni mir*, 179–84.
- 157 Quote from Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, 370; Mihiz also discusses this period in *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 139–61.
- 158 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 48.
- 159 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 63.
- 160 Again, perhaps in 1956; he reviewed until then, anyway.
- 161 Author's interview with Dobrica Ćosić, July 29, 2002.
- 162 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 182–83.
- 163 Mihiz, *Autobiografija*, v. 2, 182–83.
- 164 Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete*, 314.
- 165 Borislav Mihajlović, "Okultizam," *Politika* (November 17, 1957); published in Mihajlović, *Književni razgovori*, 281–86.
- 166 Author's interview with Dobrica Ćosić, July 29, 2002.
- 167 Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, "Vreme će napraviti red," in Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 99. This is an interview from 1981.
- 168 Predrag Palavestra wrote that Mihiz's conclusions "were short-lived, they weren't substantiated or systematic, and they could be superficial and unreliable, because they were the result of inspiration, on an impressionistic basis, quick and rash." Palavestra, *Posleratna srpska književnost*, 85.
- 169 See Ljubiša Jeremić, "Brza i pregledna reč Borislava Mihajlovića Mihiza," introduction to Borislav Mihajlović, *Književni razgovori: Izabrane kritike* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1971) xii–xiii.
- 170 (No author) "Volim komade s pevanjem i pucanjem."
- 171 Luka Mićeta, "Dedovi su pojeli unuke," in *NIN* (Belgrade) February 1, 2003.
- 172 Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete*, 318.
- 173 Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete*, 316–17.
- 174 Ugrinov, *Tople pedesete*, 109–110.
- 175 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 71.
- 176 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 65.

### CHAPTER 3

## Ćosić: Engagement and Disillusionment, 1956–1966

*To be Tito's follower means to have Tito's attitude towards life,  
to think like Tito, to fight like Tito in your times, today, always.*<sup>1</sup>

Dobrica Ćosić, 1961

When Dobrica Ćosić wrote these words, he could still be certain that he “thought like Tito.” However, by 1966, Ćosić had endured several years of real confusion, born of his belief, in spite of the Djilas crisis, that his understanding of the nature and goals of Tito’s communism were generally accepted within the party. But the years before 1966 saw competition between incompatible visions of a socialist Yugoslav society, of which his own was shared by some but, as he came to realize, not all who held power.

Ćosić’s image of the Yugoslav future was marked by profound idealism. His conviction that communism in Yugoslavia should and would result in the creation of an entirely new man, with older national identities made less relevant by the development of socialism, smacked of older forms of Serbian Yugoslavism (and even Serbian nationalism) to many non-Serbs. Ćosić was no Serbian nationalist in the early 1960s, but his imprecise notion of the Yugoslav future opened the door to hostile interpretations. Part of his problem was that he simply did not get out much: his legendary ear for the voices of the people did not extend beyond the borders of his own nation, which contributed to the belief of others that Serbs were unsympathetic to them. When his illusions collapsed, Ćosić’s response was shock and petulance.

### COMMUNISM, CULTURE, AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

As a communist intellectual, Ćosić felt the seductive pull of engagement. Engagement demanded total commitment to the commu-

nist ideal; for Ćosić, this was the complete transformation of society. The promise to the intellectual was of relevance. The burden was to effect such a transformation. Ćosić treated engagement seriously, in both its responsibilities and its promises. But the definition of engagement could vary. Miroslav Krleža later described his own expectations of engagement circumspectly: "I never had—fortunately—too many illusions about immediate results of my engagement. The number of political disagreements that I see in my past offer in that sense a monumental example to future generations."<sup>2</sup> Marko Ristić also expressed limited goals for his own engagement: "The truth is that artistic creativity and social action are two different spheres of human activity. Artistic creativity carries within it...certain constants which make it only partially reducible to a purely social conditionality and a single exclusively or directly utilitarian and practical function, to a purely 'functional' role."<sup>3</sup>

For Ćosić, who never offered a clear personal definition of the concept, engagement seems to have been a goal to which the writer had to devote himself totally in practice: in his writing, in his work for the party, in his service to the Yugoslav people. For Ćosić, engagement was the means to the end that he identified as the goal of communism in Yugoslavia: complete transformation, the achievement of modernity, the overcoming of provincial qualities. But, characteristically, Ćosić was not capable of imagining how his engagement would facilitate change. "We in Yugoslavia do not have a chemical formula for the new man," he said in one 1959 speech.<sup>4</sup> He had simply internalized the belief that intellectual engagement was one means to reach those goals, and seems to have been convinced that engagement as such would magically result in those goals being achieved. Ristić's description would have given Ćosić the leeway to act creatively in ways that were not clearly and explicitly devoted to social action. Instead, unable to define separate spheres, Ćosić opened himself up to the profound disappointment that would come of the failure of his personal vision for communism in the 1960s.

So, it was characteristic of Ćosić (and modernists, more generally) that he could not really identify the purpose of the creative act (realists had no such difficulties, believing as they tended to that creativity served the revolution in an immediate sense). All Ćosić could really identify was the task: "the intellectual member of the communist party

needs to participate in the battle for the victory of socialist social relations, a socialist economy and culture.”<sup>5</sup> “The art of socialist society is being born.” The problem of giving substance to “socialist civilization” was not limited to Ćosić, or even the broader community of writers—the League of Communists had never defined the role of the writer or artist in socialism either, with the exception of the Stalinist phase before 1952, when socialist realism was enforced as the idiom of cultural expression in Yugoslavia. Aside from the lip service given to the *borba mišljenja* at the Sixth Congress of the LCY, there were few pronouncements on the meaning of engagement. The days of administrative guidance were past, and writers enjoyed a comfort zone which allowed them to debate important issues without the overt interference of the party. Thus the realist/modernist debate occurred outside the realm of LCY politics. The party—especially the ideological commission—was confounded by the debate, concerned but not necessarily well informed. It was more troubled by the effect of certain literary phenomena on the public and that public’s faith in the new order than by how culture contributed to the building of socialism. The party felt that culture was of less import and thus best left to surrogate forums. The Yugoslavs were adventurous Marxists, but to the extent that they struck out on a “separate path to socialism,” that path was not adorned with cultural innovations.

If engagement meant anything concrete at all in postwar Yugoslavia, one would expect it to mean something about Yugoslavism. The very proclamation of a new Yugoslavia implied the need for an active and creative cultural approach emanating from the top. The early application of socialist realist precepts in Yugoslavia betrayed the fact that the national question was considered a function of the greater task of socio-economic transformation. Even if socialist realism had been abandoned, the standard of superficial, capriciously manipulative cultural policy that it had engendered had not. In the Yugoslav case, neglect of cultural development foretold greater dangers than in other socialist societies, because Yugoslavia’s successful socialist transition could be derailed by the tenacious threat of national conflict. National identity is cultural identity, so the national question demanded cultural solutions, or at least attention to cultural development. The LCY’s inattention to culture would have disastrous effects down the road.

Yugoslavism enjoyed a historical pedigree as a national movement that proposed that the individual South Slavic nations were really one. But in the Yugoslav communist lexicon, “Yugoslavism” became less prophetic and visionary and more instrumental. One observer has identified three meanings for the term as Yugoslav communists used it:

Yugoslavism was antinationalism—opposition to all the nationalisms of the nations that constitute Yugoslavia; Yugoslavism was patriotism—primarily the struggle for the liberation of Yugoslavia from the Germans, Italians, and others who had occupied it; and Yugoslavism was internationalism—the unity of the working people, who would disregard nationality in the struggle for a social revolution.<sup>6</sup>

None of these meanings demanded the destruction of existing national identities, or the creation of a supranation to bind them all. These definitions at most implied nations’ gradual reduction to irrelevance, but not their consignment to oblivion. Still, if the League of Communists of Yugoslavia never included any call for the creation of a new Yugoslav nation in any of its pronouncements, the interaction of Marxist theory, Yugoslav modifications to that theory, local and individual interpretations, and a lack of clear directives at the highest levels made for competition, confusion, and often simple disregard for the national orientation and cultural content of Yugoslav communism.

Discussions of the meaning of Yugoslavia and the relationship of its peoples generally took place in two contexts: in the party and in a regulated cultural sphere. The party was inclined to treat Yugoslav cultural policy as a tool in the amelioration of national relations across the state. Outside of the party, in that semi-autonomous cultural sphere, though, Serbian intellectuals tended to view the creation of a new, Yugoslav, culture as an end in itself, worthy because revolutionary, internationalist, and socialist. Zoran Mišić, a literary critic, took the momentous step of offering a set criteria for such a literature in *Delo* in 1956.<sup>7</sup> Mišić provoked one of two major Yugoslav writers’ debates on the subject; the second, between Dobrica Ćosić and the Slovene Dušan Pirjevec, came in 1961–62. Because Mišić suggested that there should be a Yugoslav literature, his proposal was attacked by non-Serbian writers who viewed it as crypto-Serbianism. Mišić’s pro-



posal exemplified a particular Serbian desire to overcome provincialism. Although Mišić betrayed no hunger to impose centralization on the state in either a political or literary sense, the debate that Mišić's criteria provoked with the Slovene writer Drago Šega dealt with precisely that threat.<sup>8</sup>

In late 1956, Ćosić was given the opportunity to participate in a promising endeavor: the Central Committee of the LCY assembled a committee to write a new program for the party. This program was to be an affirmation of Yugoslavia's separate road (the English translation of the program was called *Yugoslavia's Way*).<sup>9</sup> Tito and Kardelj picked Ćosić to sit on the committee, along with leading communists from across Yugoslavia. The work of the committee was laborious and lasted into the spring of 1958. Ćosić served on a subcommittee that drew up the basic structure of the program; he claims that he himself wrote drafts of the introduction, the conclusion, and the chapter on the "Social-Economic System,"<sup>10</sup> and that he was virtually the only member of the committee who actually read the drafts of the program.<sup>11</sup> The Archive of Yugoslavia has retained the records of meetings of the commission to draw up the program, as well as numerous submitted remarks on the early draft. Interestingly, there is very little consideration of cultural questions in those deliberations, with the exception of a few submissions that question the very absence of a strong statement on the role of culture in the building of socialism in Yugoslavia.<sup>12</sup> Ćosić was the only person on the committee itself who questioned the program's neglect of culture, although he was equally concerned with some indelicate language regarding the peasantry and a whole host of other formulations.<sup>13</sup>

Ćosić urged that there be more attention given to the role of culture in the construction of socialism: "Perhaps it would be useful to say something about contradictions in the national cultures and on their mutual relations, and also something about the difficulties which thereby emerge for our cultural policy and for our cultural transformation." Ćosić also pressed for a bit more attention to be given to the LCY's material support for cultural development. Kardelj, the final arbiter where the Program was concerned,<sup>14</sup> was not responsive. "We are not thinking of adding any content, any sort of formula for art and culture. We only need to say that we are as a society interested in general in art and culture and that we will give some money for it." Ćosić

insisted: "We must say something about the problematic of cultural policy. That would not infringe upon [anyone's] competence, nor [limit] cultural freedom." Kardelj retorted that "the whole chapter is presented as practical policy. That is, nothing to do with content, but which sort of material policy we should follow." Kardelj's remarks are instructive if only as a symbol of the lack of importance granted cultural questions in party forums. The absence of concern with culture betrays the obvious: the LCY, as a Marxist party, was dominated by people who believed that identity was rooted in socio-economic factors. Culture, as such, develops from a materialist base. Culture would not be an actor in the struggle to create a classless society, and culture would not be an actor in the creation of a harmonious multinational Yugoslavia; rather, classlessness and harmony would result from the building of socialism.

Kardelj's perfunctory dismissal of Čosić's concerns regarding cultural policy was reflected in the program itself, which argued that "Yugoslav socialist consciousness" was based on the equality of the Yugoslav peoples, which in turn "is made certain primarily through a material basis, social-economic relations and the socialist system itself."<sup>15</sup> The program explicitly rejected any suggestion that a new nation was in the making:

This is not a question of creating a new 'Yugoslav nation' to replace the existing nationalities but of organic growth and strengthening of the socialist community of producers or working men of all nationalities of Yugoslavia...Such Yugoslavism does not stand in the way of national languages and cultures. It presupposes them.<sup>16</sup>

"Yugoslav socialist consciousness" was thus not national, it was social, and it coexisted with national differences, which authorities in the new state expected to become less and less relevant in the daily and political life of a state founded upon working class power. Čosić's failure to impress the program committee did not dissuade him from his view that something more needed to be done to somehow overcome cultural divisions in Yugoslavia; in fact, he would pursue it in another venue, that of literary organizations, from then until 1965 (see below).

In 1958, Ćosić expanded on his ideas regarding the role of culture in socialism. They are characteristically mushy. The occasion was a poll taken by Jean Paul Sartre's *Le Temps Modernes*, and the questions concerned the role of the intellectual in socialist societies. Ćosić asserted that the role of the intellectual was to "actively engage in the tasks of the socialist avant-garde and to become its organic component." Further, he said, avant-gardism that did not serve the interest of the working class was inappropriate and, in the worst case, tragic.<sup>17</sup> But the actual task of the intellectual—the substance of his/her role—defied Ćosić's ability to generalize, as he himself acknowledged. When he attempted to, the best he could do was to assert that socialism should strive towards the "democratization of culture." Aside from certain administrative responsibilities, including the funding of cultural institutions and the building of schools, Ćosić viewed the goal of socialism to be "freedom of intellectual creation on the ideological foundations of socialism and humanism" without any institution having an intellectual monopoly. He denied the state a "directive" role in the building of socialist culture, rather preferring "social administration" and "free socialist initiative of citizens" as controls. Such an ideological "line," he believed, was sufficient to fend off "antisocialist misuse of freedom."<sup>18</sup> All in all, Ćosić placed an enormous but amorphous responsibility on the shoulders of the communist intellectual.

It is precisely in today's ideological constellation that the moral responsibility of the communist intellectual has grown to a frightening degree. The drama of revolutionary truth becomes the moral drama of this epoch. If communist intellectuals are morally defeated, if they do not have the strength and courage to accept responsibility for the fate of revolutionary Marxist truth, then our epoch will be the epoch of defeated humanism.<sup>19</sup>

The burden that Ćosić felt as well as placed on the shoulders of others was enormous, but its content was also undefined. *What*, in other words, is a Marxist culture? How would democratized culture be created while resisting "antisocialist misuse"?

## DEOBE: FRATRICIDE AS THE DARK SIDE OF SERBIANNESS

As a writer, Ćosić continued to probe the nature of the Partisan victory in World War II as well as the character of the Serbian countryside; in fact, he combined these two passions in his novel *Divisions* (Deobe) which was published in 1961. *Divisions* would be his final novel as a committed Titoist; it was written with the same goal that had animated *Roots*: to come to terms with the sources of evil and backwardness in Serbia as preparation for a true transformation. In *Divisions*, Ćosić examined the nature of the Četnik movement of the Second World War. Like *Roots*, it received the *NIN* award for novel of the year, the first time that a writer had been given the award twice. Whereas earlier, in *Roots*, Ćosić had struck a blow against the corruption of patriarchal village life in Serbia, so, with *Divisions*, he attacked what he would later describe in his debate with Dušan Pirjevec as the “vampires” of nationalism in his own Serbian house. In 1964 he described the origins of the title of the work, which he had originally called “The Knife,” and then “Liberation”: “Divisions...gives expression to a passing epoch, the epoch of revolution, epoch of social transformation, the divisions among the people, class divisions, human divisions, the divisions within ourselves.”<sup>20</sup> His subjects, the Četniks, Ćosić then said, “have been my obsession for years.”<sup>21</sup> To write the novel, Ćosić drew upon his own experiences as a Partisan, interviews with former Četniks, and victims of the Četniks. He framed the Četnik movement as a product of “the national romance, the motifs of the national ethic.” In the end, he remained fearful that he had “done an injustice to the victims” by trying too hard to understand their persecutors. But he needn’t have worried. He came to realize that the Četnik movement had been “something more tragic, more dreadful, more monstrous than that which I realized and expressed in my notes and books.” But, he added, “for the past to become a lesson and stimulus for the future, one must make that which is most monstrous in it human; crime must become a human situation in order to have a human resonance, a human message.”<sup>22</sup> *Divisions* was a more sophisticated search for some sort of useable truth in the recent Serbian past than other treatments of the Četniks to that point had offered to Yugoslavs, but Ćosić did not suggest—as many might

today—that there was something worthwhile in the movement. Ćosić described it as almost incomprehensible horror. Upon reading the novel in the light of Ćosić's life after it—and in particular, given the themes examined in this chapter, in which Ćosić seems to expand his own interpretation of the Četniks to Serbian society as a whole—one wonders whether he ultimately allowed his own outsider's explanation of the Četniks to take over his historical vision in general. "Divisions" became his personal motif, transferred far beyond the limited realm of the Četnik movement.

*Divisions* is a long novel with a simple structure. The focuses on four carefully chosen characters who animate various sources of the Četnik movement, using long monologues as his explanatory vehicle: (1) in the character of Uroš Babović ("Vojvoda Planinski"), Ćosić alerts us to the traditional, rural, origins of the movement—origins that were explored also in his earlier novel, *Roots*; (2) Doctor Bata Pavlović, an intellectual and politician from Belgrade, "European" and always in opposition to the corrupt Belgrade regimes, exemplifies the tired liberal idealism that drove many into the Četnik ranks, not willing to acknowledge their own collaboration but even less willing to work with the communists; (3) Mladen Rakić, a young, educated Serb who comes from Belgrade after the German occupation, is a firm Serbian nationalist who is ultimately seduced by the cult of blood in his passionate hatred of communists; and (4) Kosta Cvetić is a soldier in the Royal Yugoslav army who views the Partisan/Četnik conflict as a purely professional, military matter.

Ćosić opens the novel with a short chapter entitled "confusion." The chapter is a moving testament to Ćosić's dire need to come to terms with the Četnik phenomenon.

Your bones have long turned grey and—they are silent. That must mean that you are dead. But we meet in dreams. We meet everywhere. I hear you. Every morning the newspaper speaks of you, of killing, of war. There are many of you around. You sharpen your knives. And you use your knives everywhere where freedom stands tall. Who are you, what are you, what did you intend?<sup>23</sup>

Here Ćosić also establishes his central theme of division.

In Prerovo, and from both sides of the river, a great gathering and division of people. Not all at once, and not final. Then consciously, as Prerovians will, laboriously sticking to the meadows, vinyards, and forests, they sewed death to the Germans and their allies. And assuredly, our own, richly so. But first off we began the argument about the timing. 'It is time for us to raise up and stand tall,' we shouted, and they whispered: 'It is still not the right time, we will wait and save our heads.'<sup>24</sup>

Those who "rose up and stood tall, looking off in the distance," saw the "red star with the hammer and sickle" and became Partisans. Those who wished to wait, "bent and turned to the past," carried the "king's coat of arms with the death's head attached."<sup>25</sup> They were Četniks. With the divisions established,

around Prerovo and the shores of the river the slaughter began. We no longer divided ourselves between the superior and the dependent, owners and laborers; we were no longer comrades, nor friends, nor relatives, nor countrymen. Nor Serbs. We became simply those who slaughtered and those who were to be slaughtered, just daggers and necks.<sup>26</sup>

Not only Serbs were divided: humanity, for Ćosić, in this novel, rested across a divide, and that divide bisected Serbia itself:

Fear is in everything: in the forests and the skies, equally treacherous, in each rising and setting of the sun, in the Morava which eats meadows and people and leads to the east, Asia, and offers it to the west, Europe. Only wars cross it through Serbia, in both directions only death; death under all sorts of omens.

And fear defines the lives of those who slaughter:

The fear of forests, skies, Morava, paths, fear of day and night, sons inherit from their fathers; fear is in the blood, eyes, hands, and smiles, and songs; fear is love, and hate; it is an immeasurable, primeval richness. In every life, and always: at the beginning of all is fear.<sup>27</sup>

The setting—fear, slaughter, divisions—dominates the novel, which is comprised of three long volumes of ruminations by the various central characters.

To Ćosić, the Četniks are both the product and the embodiment of the myth of the Serbian peasant heartland. When Rakić, the young Belgrade student, wants to join the patriotic cause, he determines that “one must leave this place [Belgrade], save oneself, save one’s consciousness, one’s ideals, one’s soul. One must go to Serbia, authentic, peasant, true Serbia. There the war must begin. It is this Serbia which the communists want to inflame and destroy.”<sup>28</sup> In that Serbia, Mladen would find and join the forces of the warlord Vojvoda Planinski, before the war simply the Prerovo landholder Uroš Babović, whose “hatred of communists is instinctive hatred. Primal hatred. He sees communists as organic enemies of life, with no political convictions or ideological-philosophical views...” Less heroic than Karadjordje, more a tactician like Miloš Obrenović, Vojvoda Planinski was for Mladen “honorable in his cunning.”<sup>29</sup> To this idealization of the peasant Serb, Ćosić adds the image of the politician Bata Pavlović, an intellectual whose disappointment with past failures of the Serbian national cause—following the Balkan and First World Wars—has led him to the woods to compose a purely Serbian national program (a “Memorandum on the Četnik National-Democratic Movement”). For Pavlović, the struggle between the Četniks and the communists is a sad but inevitable one, made unavoidable by the corruption of earlier Serbian regimes:

Our fateful error from the Balkan wars to now is that we, politicians, intellectuals, and all sorts of ideologues, gave in to the miserly, marketplace mentality: overlordship and hatred towards those whom we meet, the tattered, silent, treacherous, slinking, ready to bite. They hate us, they will be revenged on us. Besides, wars have always been peasant revenge on the city. And this war will be no different.<sup>30</sup>

Pavlović differs from the other intellectual Četnik, Mladen, in that he realizes that the Serbian peasant has been given good reason to fall prey to the message of the communists. But Pavlović’s defeatism, his patient acceptance of the inevitability of such a peasant/city war, his

gracious acknowledgment of its origins—in the corruption of earlier Serbian regimes—renders him the most pathetic of the major characters of *Divisions*. He gives idealistic expression to his indifference to the peasant by presenting it as principle: “the entirety of my political program is in a single word: freedom. Yes, even more than bread. That’s right. Democracy is the right to go hungry.”<sup>31</sup>

The global interpretation of Serbian history to which the characters in *Divisions* testify is that Serbia has always been rent by conflict between fathers and sons and their willingness to murder each other. Two pairs of fathers and sons reflect that eternal order: Adam Katić and his son Dušan and Uroš Babović and his son Miloš. Adam, a six-year-old boy at the end of *Roots*, is now the father of Dušan, a Partisan commandant, but will not denounce him—the memories of his grandfather’s rejection of his own sons is too fresh, the resulting collapse of his family too tangible. But Babović orders the death of Miloš. Babović’s denunciation of his son is elevated to an existential need by Čosić’s Četniks: as one prepares to murder a prisoner, another muses that “if the father had not condemned the son, the son would have condemned the father. That’s how it always is. Throughout the entire world.”<sup>32</sup> “Revolution is patricide. The end of this world,” says one priest who sides with the Četniks.<sup>33</sup> But not only revolution is patricide: Serbia is patri- (and fratri-) cidal. Its history tells us so.

This is already the third Serbian uprising. In the first, Karadjordje killed his father. At the beginning of the second, Miloš Obrenović convinced Vujica Vuličević to club to death his godfather Karadjordje with a saber. Eh, Miloš Obrenović was a true Serb. First he got the Turk into his grasp, then notched him with his knife. Congratulations to him. That, peasants, was the second Serbian uprising. After that, thus, prince Miloš Obrenović jailed his own son, named Blažnavac, via the Viennese police. Then king Aleksandar Obrenović ran his own father king Milan Obrenović out of the country.<sup>34</sup>

To provide historical balance, the reader is also reminded that Karadjordje “killed his father, his own father...and killed his brother, and raised Serbia in rebellion against the Turks, founded a dynasty



and through heroism and fame made himself eternal, and will last as long as Serbia lasts.”<sup>35</sup>

Situating *Divisions* in Ćosić’s career and oeuvre requires some care. When he wrote it (between 1955 and 1961), he was moved by the purest of motives: to understand evil. Still, he did so as one who had internalized the demonic version of the Četnik movement, the only option available to a Yugoslav writer in the early 1960s and the only choice amenable to Ćosić in any case. He did not, and would never, attempt to rehabilitate that movement, and his well-intentioned desire to come to an understanding of it would founder in any case because he was the captive of such visceral and horrifying imagery. So none of his characters’ violent ramblings can be attributed to him personally. If anything, he exaggerated horror to make his point about the Četniks as clear as possible, as is the case with a famous “article” embedded in the novel on the nature of the “knife,” a blood-curdling section whose ideas have wrongly been attributed to Ćosić himself.<sup>36</sup> Having said that, the novel provided an interpretive historical framework that was easily adaptable to other times and other situations. The notion that evil can step in and too easily split the primordially divisive Serbian people and victimize those pure who remained did not require much modification as new Serbian enemies appeared, from without and within. Those enemies, like the Četniks before them, would capitalize on Serbian divisiveness.

### ĆOSIĆ: INSIDER OUT

Ćosić’s polemic with the Slovene writer Dušan Pirjevec in 1961–62 gave him the opportunity to act from a position of power in putting forth his ideas on nationhood and nationalism in the new Yugoslavia.<sup>37</sup> The occasion for the polemic was a January 1961 interview of Ćosić in the Zagreb newspaper *Telegram*. In that interview—and in passing, as Ćosić would remind Pirjevec—Ćosić was asked whether Yugoslavs were still “too passive in inter-republican contacts.” Ćosić responded that the question would be valid “as long as republics exist.” To this formulation, which clearly implied that Ćosić believed that republics should and would eventually disappear, Pirjevec responded with a sarcastic, biting commentary in the Slovene journal *Naša sodobnost*.

His point, following some attenuated logic, was that Čosić's comment cloaked a desire that Yugoslavia's republics be eliminated in favor of a single, centralized state organization. Pirjevec's response revealed his own fear that Čosić wished the assimilation of Yugoslavia's nations. Čosić's debate with Pirjevec is often cited as the first public discussion of the nature of the national problem in postwar Yugoslavia. But the Čosić-Pirjevec "polemic" was actually a surrogate for intraparty debate over the Yugoslav future. Pirjevec was almost certainly guided by Slovenian communist leader Boris Kraigher, while Čosić claims that he was prompted to action by Jovan Veselinov, a leading Serbian communist, and Tito himself.<sup>38</sup> Given Čosić's later reputation as a nationalist, it is easy enough to forget that in 1961, Čosić's position reflected the status quo in Tito's Yugoslavia.

The sense of this lengthy polemic is fairly simple to encapsulate: Pirjevec called upon an idiosyncratic understanding of Marxism to support the notion that nationality is an integral part of human identity, and that any attempt to create a Yugoslav socialism that undermined national identity could not be supported in ideological or human terms. Čosić, acting at that point in consonance with all precedents on the national question in Tito's Yugoslavia, argued otherwise, but not in the belief that national identity should be destroyed. Instead, Čosić's argument was that Yugoslavism was a social construct that would, even when it reached its full development, coexist with national identities as cultural identities, which would be by necessity less important than the higher identification with socialist society. Čosić's elaboration of this idea could have been taken directly out of the 1958 Program of the League of Communists. Čosić:

Yugoslavism which is a social, and not a national category; Yugoslavism which is society and not a nation; Yugoslavism which is consistent with federalism; Yugoslavism which does not negate national independence and in no way denies national liberty. We pronounce ourselves for Yugoslavism—as a framework for internationalism, Yugoslavism—as a socialistic association of equal and free peoples, an association of peoples without any sort of or anyone's national privileges, Yugoslavism—as a free process by which nations and people grow together and unify socialistically,

Yugoslavism—as a part of a historically inevitable process of the integration of the world and the appearance of socialist civilization on this planet, Yugoslavism—as a society of free democratic creations of the national-collective and individual personality.<sup>39</sup>

Nationalisms could be found, Ćosić asserted, in two places: first, among “classic counter-revolutionaries,” but also among socialists: in the bureaucracy, among those who see a chance for enrichment, careerists. The latter form of nationalism could be “an expression of the youthfulness of national liberation of peoples who only achieved full political personality with the revolution,” and should not be condemned out of hand. Ćosić suggested to Pirjevec that they should each deal first with nationalisms among their own peoples (as Ćosić could argue he had recently done with *Divisions*) rather than seek them out elsewhere, as Pirjevec had done. Ćosić’s definition of the goals of Yugoslav socialism was the same as the official version put forth by the League of Communists, which was one reason why Ćosić’s responses to Pirjevec both bristled with self-confidence and dripped with the self-pity of the unjustly attacked.

The Pirjevec polemic marked a watershed for Ćosić, who believed that his understanding of the task of socialism was identical to the party’s: to create a Yugoslavia in which a socialist identity would not replace but would become more important than national identity. That understanding informed not only cultural polemics and writings on nations under Tito’s rule, but the very organization of the state. And there is plenty of symbolic evidence that Ćosić enjoyed the confidence of Tito and that he returned that confidence. In 1961, for instance, he was offered and accepted the honor of traveling in Tito’s delegation aboard the presidential yacht, the *Galeb*, to Africa. Along with Lazar Koliševski, Veljko Mićunović, and others, he accompanied Tito to eight North African states on a diplomatic mission. Ćosić has been razzed ever since for taking this 72-day, extraordinarily luxurious, trip.<sup>40</sup> To later accusations that this trip proved that Ćosić was the “court writer” of his time, Ćosić has responded that “the experiences and knowledge gained on that trip have been far more important for me than all of the discomfort that has resulted from it and my participation in it.”<sup>41</sup> As with his earlier “fact-finding” mission to Goli Otok,

Ćosić was able to justify a trip that certainly deserved the reputation it gained by claiming that it gave him insight into the system that he later condemned.

Then, seven months after the end of his tour on the Galeb, Ćosić authored the introduction to Tito's book *Forty-one*, about the communist uprising. Tito assumes a spiritual importance for Ćosić: while

European armies withdrew to their trenches, with white flags raised in the air...there was a Croat, metal worker, revolutionary, secretary of the Communist party, who entered the history of Yugoslavia, the Balkans and Europe with his strong step, with new ideas, angry and tender voice, different in every way from any leader, general, or politician to that point in the Balkans; he was a man called to alter the fate of this land, to mark its most decisive epoch with his name and work.<sup>42</sup>

This man, Tito, had "the moral, ideological, and creative power to utter the most human and most revolutionary sentence which in the entire world at that time could be uttered: 'We will be the sowers of brotherhood among peoples.'" <sup>43</sup> "Upon these words of Tito, a generation carried out the liberating exploits of an era, soared to the heights of promethean ethics, became the carrier of heroic and true humanism."<sup>44</sup> And so on; Ćosić was, in spite of his claims that his faith in Tito had been shaken as early as 1954, at the height of his appreciation of Tito and Titoism at this point, in November 1961. However, from 1961 to 1966, Ćosić and all Yugoslavs came to question their comfortable assumptions about socialist Yugoslavism, as the party began to reassess the nature of self-managing Yugoslavism. The battle was waged between 1961 and 1966, framed by the first discussions of a lagging economy in 1961 and the removal of Aleksandar Ranković from his position as vice-president of Yugoslavia in 1966. By all accounts, the Ćosić-Pirjevec polemic was an integral part of this battle, as opposing sides used the two writers as surrogates in their struggle to define Yugoslavia's future.

By 1961, economic performance in Yugoslavia had begun to slow noticeably. For the first time, the LCY re-examined the organization of the state, albeit from a purely economic perspective. At this point we begin to hear of "liberal" and "conservative" approaches to eco-

conomic reform.<sup>45</sup> Liberals favored increased room in the economy for entrepreneurialism, which implied expanded civil liberties; conservatives wished to retain a centrally-governed economy and saw no need to reduce the party's monopoly on power. Tito's own impulse was to favor the conservatives, which he did publicly in a May 1962 speech at Split. But in December 1962 and January 1963 two conferences of economists produced reports that called into doubt the conservative position. The result of expanded dialogue about economic change was a series of proposals, ranging from the creation of a virtually free market to the return to full central planning. The controversy over economic reform acted as camouflaged political debate. The conservative position found support among some, but not all, Serbian economists. One historian has noted that in spite of the economic logic of the liberal (market reform) position, many Serbian economists nonetheless gravitated to the conservative position out of a sense of national loyalty.<sup>46</sup> The fruits of this ongoing discussion included the 1963 constitution, which, while not empowering the republics as such, did initiate the gradual devolution of economic decision-making power from the center to enterprises and local governments. The Eighth Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, held in December 1964 in Belgrade, placed the party seal of approval on economic reforms supported by the liberals. In his opening speech to the congress, Tito himself attacked nationalism of the "centralist" variety, obviously referring to Serbian nationalism, which he accused of looking forward to the elimination of nationalities and the creation of an "artificial" Yugoslav nation.<sup>47</sup> Tito's speech cleared the way for reforms of the economy that would bring decentralizing political reforms with them. So Pirjevec, Ćosić would later say, had won.<sup>48</sup> Ćosić's distress with changes in Yugoslav administration would grow over the next four years.

#### LIBERATING LITERATURE

In Yugoslavia it was inevitable that changes in state administration would be felt through the system, including professional organizations. Writers were no exception. The League of Writers of Yugoslavia was created to pass policy directives from the state and party down the social and political ladder to the new literary elite of Yugoslavia.

Within it were constituent republic organizations—the Serbian Writers' Union, the Croatian Writers' Society (*Društvo književnika Hrvatske*, DKH) and others, one for each republic. As early as 1957, some writers, led by Ćosić and Oskar Davičo, began to flirt with the idea of a reorganization of the League of Writers that would allow members to group according to aesthetic criteria instead of being limited to regional associations.<sup>49</sup> The formulation of the new Program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in that year allowed Yugoslavs to believe that the party would fulfill the promises of the break with Stalin: more self-management, more openness in society. As a member of the committee to write the new program, Ćosić had discovered firsthand just how little importance the party elite placed on substantive efforts to overcome cultural divisions in Yugoslavia. For those writers favoring reorganization, the unveiling of the new program seemed a useful moment to make the next logical transition, towards greater integration and, importantly, more substantive Yugoslavism. Ćosić and Davičo broached the topic first in 1958 in Ljubljana, where the Seventh Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia was meeting and unveiling the new Program.<sup>50</sup> The proposal was met, in Ćosić's words, with "a very sharp denunciation by a great number of writers."<sup>51</sup>

By the time that the Seventh Congress of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia met in Titograd in September, 1964, a more coherent movement had emerged favoring reorganization of literary associations. Ćosić claimed that about 80 writers, from all of the republics but Slovenia, signed the proposal, and he maintained that it was therefore a "Yugoslav" initiative. But extant documents indicate that only 37 writers signed, with Serbs being most represented.<sup>52</sup> They were referred to as the "Ćosić Group," and Ćosić himself described the proposal as the work of "some people from Belgrade."<sup>53</sup> The motion suggested "...that alongside the principle of national-territorial organization of writers, the right of writers be affirmed in the statute to organize also on other bases and according to other similarities and affinities..."<sup>54</sup> At Titograd in 1964, the SkJ opted to postpone study of the proposal, due to extensive opposition from the Slovene contingent and other individuals who saw in it the Trojan Horse of Serbian centralism. Consideration of Ćosić's proposal was put off (as were all questions related to the issuance of a new statute for the league) until an extraordinary congress could meet the following winter.

In the meantime, republican organizations were directed to discuss and decide on the various proposals before the league. The Serbian Writers Association met on February 21, 1965. By this time Ćosić harbored few illusions that he would have the support of his own organization. The February meeting gave him the opportunity to expand on his notions for reform of the writers' organization, but he fought an uphill battle, and his presentation to the membership of the UKS was cynical and bored. He had been asked to provide a written proposal for consideration before the meeting but did not do so. The existing proposal was imprecise. What would "aesthetic affinities" mean? Would these special groups meet outside of the boundaries of the League of Writers, because if so, there was then no need for the League to pass judgment. Would these new working groups be under the umbrella of republican or federal writers' associations? Ćosić admitted that

I have no formula, I have no prepared concrete proposal. We need to think it over, we need to agree in principle whether there is any sense in doing something and in supporting something like this.... I see in this the possibility of shaking up our literary life in a positive sense, to make possible in a positive sense some sort of initiatives which might be objectively useful socially, culturally, however you like.

He imagined that potential avenues for organizing writers' groups might include "organizations of writers around one journal, one publishing house, some home region; around, for instance, a social program, that people organize on some cultural program...on some Yugoslav level."<sup>55</sup> Regardless his inability to offer precise examples how this new organizational principle would work, Ćosić was certain that the current, republican basis for the organization of the League of Writers was "in essence, a confederalistic principle of organization" which should be discussed openly, "without demagoguery and without hypocrisy."

Ćosić suspected that this confederalistic principle promised the revival of nationalism in Yugoslavia. Proponents of Ćosić's proposal argued that they were helping to fulfill one of the promises of communism in Yugoslavia—the creation of a Yugoslav culture. In fact, one can look at the proposal as an answer to Mišić's earlier call for spontaneity in the creation of a Yugoslav culture. Sveta Lukić had observed

at the Titograd congress that “affinities may be deeply aesthetic...It is important, I think, that these affinities generate results that are more Yugoslav than they have been to date.”<sup>56</sup> So the importance of this resolution for Ćosić and others was that it would contribute to the creation of a true Yugoslav culture; in its current state, for Ćosić, Davičo, and their supporters, literature which developed regionally and nationally inhibited the development of aesthetic, cross-national, potentially supranational forms. Davičo, the co-author of the motion, offered the best, if not the clearest, testimony to the long term, more idealistic goals of the proposal.

I think that we have in our society, in our association, in relations between writers, a series of problems of moral and other natures, about which we should talk...One of the motives, not the only one, not the first one, comrade Dobrica mentioned a second ago. That is the problem of relations of us writers towards that which is called Yugoslavia. I think, comrades, that creating a national culture, contributing with our work to the creation of a consciousness, a self-feeling in broad strokes of a nation, one writer, a citizen of this country, surely cannot remain limited only to his narrow homeland, nor only to his republic, but has in view, and must have in view, his entire country. And I can tell you that in Zagreb, in Ljubljana, or in Skopje, in Sarajevo, or in Titograd there are writers, I have comrades, I have friends, who are much closer, much tighter than many writers, many of my friends and comrades here, regarding a whole series of ideas, a whole set of conceptions.

Opponents of Ćosić’s proposal feared that it barely cloaked the “Great Serbian” desires of its proponents, who, they asserted, would eventually destroy the regional organization and impose one federal association with loose-knit, non-national groupings within it. The death of republican organizations was, they felt, a step in the direction of the elimination of republics altogether. Davičo addressed these concerns:

I think that if we organized a group of writers alongside these republican frameworks, if a writers’ group were formed...that would not mean great Serbianism, nor great Croatianism, nor great Slovenianism, or who knows what to call it: any sort of chau-



vinism. That would not mean the imposition of some sort of unitaristic conception. Each of us, working as a Croat, as a Slovene, Macedonian, etc., in the framework of his own language and his own traditional, so to speak, associations and coordinates, would be opting for, would have in view something which is common to all nations, he would have in view today, and our future.

But Davičo's pleas could not obscure the lack of depth to the thinking of Ćosić and his "group." For example, it would seem self-evident that in attacking the regional basis of the writers' organizations, the movers of the proposal envisioned aesthetic communities that crossed regional boundaries. It is difficult, then, to explain the comment by Sveta Lukić, one of Ćosić's allies, who could not answer a simple question from a critic: would he "accept, for instance, a comrade from Slovenia" into an aesthetically or otherwise organized writers' group? Lukić, confused by the obvious, answered that he would have to consult his colleagues.<sup>57</sup>

The board of the Serbian Writers' Association voted down Ćosić's proposal at this February 1965 meeting.<sup>58</sup> Soon thereafter, Ćosić published an article in *Praxis* that, in part, was a final attempt to urge his conception for reorganization on his fellows.<sup>59</sup> "The solution to the social problem of our culture is today undoubtedly not to be found in the resigned exhalings of some genial ministers of culture, nor in the existence of a cultural administration of patronage, nor in the efficacy of a powerful and intelligent bureaucracy...many problems cannot be solved at the existing level and existing structure of socialist self-management, political inertia, and dogmatic and doctrinaire declarations of a means to an end."<sup>60</sup> Characteristically obscure, this passage presses Ćosić's message that bureaucracy could not promote creativity in an enlightened fashion, and in fact often impeded it.

I think that if we continue to defend each of our constructions, each framework, each law, each declaration of the social-political system, and any political orientation and measure, with dogmatic and doctrinaire inviolability and lack of criticism, then very serious problems and difficult results will be produced for our socialistic progress, and even when their results are expressly negative, we justify them with historical necessity.<sup>61</sup>

Ćosić then asserts that for him “Yugoslavism and that which is Yugoslav are not just territorial categories and the name of a state federation...[they] have a certain social-historical content and function...to declare myself a follower of Yugoslavism today is for me the same as to proclaim myself a follower of freedom and socialism.”<sup>62</sup> As was his wont, Ćosić evinced frustration with others’ inability or unwillingness to understand him: in this piece, he rages about having “to always name all political-ideological assumptions, even alphabetical notions, if we do not wish to be proclaimed nationalists, hegemonists, unitarists, centralists, bureaucrats.”<sup>63</sup> Finally, he recites the official conception of “Yugoslav” culture:

Above all, Yugoslav culture is not a national culture and I do not believe that it will ever be that; Yugoslav culture is not a state culture and does not need to ever be that. Yugoslav culture is made of national cultures and the cultures of nationalities, which today develop in conditions of national, social, and individual freedom, in conditions of political and social equality in interpersonal relations.<sup>64</sup>

But, he clearly does believe a “Yugoslav” culture is a near-historical-inevitability, one of the singular products of socialist revolution: “Yugoslav characteristics, the Yugoslav content of national cultures, in essence and in the historical sense, are characteristics and contents which we call the process of universalization of contemporary national cultures, the process whose fundamental actors are material-technical, general-civilizational, and socialist-liberationist progress of the contemporary world. That Yugoslav...is one new social, human, and historical quality.”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, and rather frantically, Ćosić reasserts his belief that this new culture will not be built upon the violent destruction of the national cultures of Yugoslavia:

...this Yugoslav is not and does not dare ever to contest or deny national liberty, originality, or specificity, just as it dare not have its final end in existing political borders of the Yugoslav federation; that Yugoslav is not the unification of values and the violent ending of differences; that Yugoslav is the respect of difference

and special qualities, a framework for the mutual creative emphasis and affirmation; that is unity as the collective difference.<sup>66</sup>

I take seriously Ćosić's protestations that his vision of Yugoslav culture was not intended as a threat to existing national cultures, that "Yugoslav culture" reflected his vision of his land joining a modern, universal, non-national world. Yugoslav, for Ćosić, meant the activation of socialist values and culture. But equally clear is that others feared for their own national cultures to the point that universalism simply had no appeal if it meant their own destruction in this, Ćosić's, Yugoslavia.

Overwrought last-ditch, not to mention typically obscure and abstract, efforts to convince a Yugoslav intellectual elite of the value of his conception of Yugoslav culture did nothing to build support for Ćosić's resolution for a reorganization of the League of Writers. In December, 1965, an extraordinary meeting of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia met in Belgrade to discuss the proposal, among others. Ćosić did not even attend the meeting. In fact, as it convened, he had just formally resigned from the Serbian Writers' Association.<sup>67</sup> He realized that his movement had already been defeated. When asked to comment on the League of Yugoslav Writers as the congress met, Ćosić said: "I think that the last [1964] Congress of Writers of Yugoslavia was a convincing confirmation of the bureaucratism, apathy, conservatism, and backwardness in the soul of republic and associational (*udruženjski*) literature."<sup>68</sup> The League of Writers was now merely "an expression and mechanism of republican and national bureaucratism and centralism..." Now, as he saw it, Yugoslav writers had chosen atomization and fragmentation instead of integration and a new consciousness: "Yugoslav federalistic centralism and bureaucratism are exchanged for republican centralism and national bureaucratism. All in all, many writers believe that republican and national bureaucratism and étatism are better and more bearable, and perhaps more democratic, than that federal, 'Belgrade,' version."<sup>69</sup> At the extraordinary Belgrade congress in 1965, Mihiz remarked portentously that the failure of the resolution marked the first time that confederalism was formally accepted in principle in Yugoslavia.<sup>70</sup> At a remarkably early date, then, the potential decentralization of Yugoslavia had

become a source of resentment for many Serbian writers, a limited but influential group.

So Ćosić's muddled proposal was not approved. This was just about the final blow in a long battle to nourish his image of the socialist revolution in Yugoslavia, an image that grew more and more difficult to sustain under the succession of radical changes in Tito's administration of the state. Although in hindsight it appears to be entirely beside the point how writers organize themselves—after all, the critics were right, any writers could meet with and collaborate with anyone they wished—Ćosić understood that Yugoslav (or Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, etc) reality followed Yugoslav administrative norms. His proposal implied the eventual withering away—if not active destruction—of a regional, republican bureaucracy administering writers. Its success or failure would be a measure of the plausibility of the removal of those same boundaries in other spheres of Yugoslav life. Ćosić viewed the failure of his resolution as the failure of Yugoslavism at the top, with Tito and Edvard Kardelj. He was not surprised by resistance from his fellow writers, but the lack of continued commitment to the complete transformation of Yugoslav culture(s) by the regime disturbed him greatly.

### ĆOSIĆ AND THE RANKOVIĆ AFFAIR

While Ćosić sniffed out evidence of Tito's and other Yugoslavs' lack of commitment to a universalist working-class Yugoslav identity in the cultural sphere, events were moving much more quickly in the realm of political power. In July 1966, Aleksandar Ranković, the vice-president of Yugoslavia and, until 1964, the head of state security in Yugoslavia (UDBa), was purged from his positions and eventually kicked out of the League of Communists. This event—the removal of the second of Tito's three lieutenants (Djilas had been the first to go, in 1954)—has never been adequately examined, although that fact is probably a function of the opacity of his very removal. Was the security service out of control? Was Ranković the head of a clique planning his takeover of power from Tito? Did Ranković or his helpers actually bug Tito's bedroom? Was Ranković the head of an anti-Albanian, counter-revolutionary movement in Kosovo? Was Ranković the revisitation of hegemonic Great Serbianism in Yugoslavia? All of these accusations were

leveled by any of a number of Ranković's critics and inquisitors. Many of them were probably true, and others were inconsequential—but the veracity of the accusations was not as important as the changed atmosphere in Yugoslavia. The importance of Ranković's removal was in its symbolism: he represented entrenched opposition to reforms that were underway in Yugoslavia.

The Ranković affair began as a demotion.<sup>71</sup> On June 16, 1966, the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia approved the formation, on Tito's recommendation, of a commission to examine "some questions about the work of the organs of state security, plus the appearance of serious misuse of these organs with political goals on the part of certain functionaries." This commission had representation from each of the six republics. Six days later, it produced a preliminary report which was presented to representatives of the League of Communists of Serbia and Serbs who served in federal capacities. At this meeting, it was agreed that by July 1 a final report based on the commission's work be presented. Soon after that meeting, the central committees of each republican League of Communists met to discuss the report.

A portion of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia met on June 28. There, Dobrica Ćosić condemned the proceedings, asserting that the charges against Ranković and the state security service were criminal in nature: "Do not make a political question out of criminals...if it is the truth, place Ranković before the court and try him. There is a criminal law code and anyone who insults the civil integrity of the President of the Republic and bugs intimate quarters should be judged according to it."<sup>72</sup> Ćosić was not a powerful enough figure to thwart an action planned on high, however, and the judgment of Ranković continued to be pursued politically.

On July 1, 1966, the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia met on the island of Brioni. Here Ranković and his recent replacement as head of UDBa, Svetislav Stefanović, were condemned for a limited number of infractions. They boiled down to one critical accusation: that state security answered to only one man on the Central Committee of the League of Communists, Aleksandar Ranković, instead of the committee as a whole. Thus, in the words of Krste Crvenkovski, the Macedonian who chaired the commission, "comrade Aleksandar Ranković became

synonymous with the Central Committee.”<sup>73</sup> As the member of the Central Committee responsible for “cadre policy” (meaning, placement of personnel), by relying on his private sources of intelligence on individuals throughout the country, Ranković had been able to twist the work of the Central Committee to his own personal advantage.<sup>74</sup> In the name of the commission, Crvenkovski offered four proposals: that the organs of state security be reorganized, with political functionaries placed in positions of authority; that the investigation of UDBa continue with the aim of uncovering the nature and goals of those who misused their positions in the security apparatus; that Svetislav Stefanović be removed from the Central Committee of the LCY and kicked out of the League of Communists; and that Ranković’s resignation as vice-president of the state, secretary of the Central Committee of the LCY, and member of the Central Committee of the LCY (given earlier, at a session of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the LCY) be accepted.

At Brioni, Ranković spoke twice in his own defense. Concluding his first foray, he acknowledged problems in state security and took some responsibility for those problems:

Once again, comrades, I wish to emphasize that I bear no responsibility other than moral for such work and such behavior in the organs of state security, which comes out of the fact that it was necessary to show more alertness, both earlier when I immediately directed this institution, and also through my work in the Central Committee. With regard to that, I believe that I am duty-bound to place my functions at the disposal of this forum, of you comrades.<sup>75</sup>

After Tito, among others, proclaimed Ranković’s remarks insufficient, Ranković returned to speak: “I am prepared within the limits of my further possibilities to counter any attempt at the gathering of any people on any given line which would be contrary to the League of Communists, because that could be an unprincipled, anti-party, uncommunist assemblage.”<sup>76</sup> Of course, these words were spoken in vain, as Ranković must have understood, for it was his explicit, implicit, or purely symbolic opposition to the current “line” that had gotten him in trouble in the first place.

From the republican central committees on down to the local district committees, Yugoslav communists were directed by the LCY to deal with the results of the Brioni plenum. The Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia set up its own commission to examine the evidence regarding UDBa a few days after Brioni; it presented its report on September 5, 1966 to the Central Committee; the Sixth Plenum of the CC LCS met on September 14 and 15 to hear the results. The League of Communists of Serbia, to the dismay of Tito, Kardelj, and of course many Serbs, moved beyond the limits set at Brioni, which had only asserted that under Ranković and Stefanović, UDBa had abused its power. Furthermore, at Brioni, it was only determined that Ranković should give up his positions—not, however, his LCY membership. It was only in the context of the Serbian phase of the affair that other accusations—primarily that Ranković had acted in a chauvinistic fashion and had used UDBa to crush the freedoms of Albanians in Kosovo—were leveled. At the Sixth Plenum, a report of the Regional Committee of the League of Communists of Kosovo and Metohija was entered into the record. This report concluded that the security services in Kosovo actively persecuted those of Albanian nationality. “The ideological foundation of such policy under the competence of Serbia is nationalism and chauvinism.”<sup>77</sup> Other than those accusations related to Kosovo, the Serbian conclusions mirrored the Yugoslav version. The Serbian LC also added Vojin Lukić, the organizational secretary of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia and former federal minister of internal affairs, to the short list of “fractionists” with Ranković and Stefanović.

The discussion at the Sixth Plenum of the conclusions of the Serbian investigation focused on Ranković the fractionist and chauvinist. Many commentators noted the atmosphere created by the dismissal of Ranković—an atmosphere in which one heard that “all of this was directed against Serbia” and that “Serbia no longer has a representative who will represent its interests,” for instance. Dušan Petrović Šane said that “slogans like ‘Serbia is endangered’ and ‘the best people in Serbia are leaving’ speak best about which forces supported the fraction until recently.” This was not an exaggeration: over the next thirty years, Serbian opponents of Titoism would relentlessly level precisely those charges. With reference to these “defenders of Serbia,” Petrović noted sardonically, “the working class and the communists

of Serbia will find the best solution, which will suit the Serbian people, its socialist development, with the alert protection of brotherhood and unity and the principles of socialist solidarity with other peoples of Yugoslavia.”<sup>78</sup> Petrović completed his comments with some historical context: “I think that in Serbia, for objective historical reasons, various nationalistic phenomena with unitaristic, hegemonistic tendencies can and do appear, just as in other republics, again for objective historical reasons, various nationalistic phenomena of a different sort can and do appear.”<sup>79</sup> This meeting included representatives of the Regional Committee from Kosovo and Metohija, Veli Deva (the secretary of that committee), Kolj Široka, and Ali Šukrija. Each man expanded on the general accusation that Ranković had sown discord in Kosovo by tormenting its ethnic Albanian population, with long discourses including details of particular episodes of persecution. Mihailo Švabić, a Serbian member of the LCS Central Committee, provided a long-remembered cap to this portion of the discussion by pronouncing himself “ashamed—as a communist, as a Serb, and as a man—as I listened to the presentation of comrade Deva...”<sup>80</sup> Serbian communists initiated the discussion of conditions in Kosovo; Serbian communists (responding to public rumblings) initiated the discussion of Ranković as the centerpiece of a chauvinistic, Great Serbian, hegemonistic clique; and a Serbian communist (Spasenije Babović) called for Ranković to be expelled from the party, which the Central Committee of the SKS agreed to do.

Dobrica Ćosić claims to have openly opposed the treatment of Ranković. We have already read one of his comments from the meeting of the Central Committee of the SKS on June 28, 1966, and Ćosić and others assert that he wrote a letter to Tito himself expressing his anger at the proceedings. But all subsequent citations of Ćosić’s comments at the June 28 meeting and thereafter appear to be reconstructions based on Ćosić’s memory. Tito is said to have informally discussed Ćosić’s letter at the Brioni Plenum, but “the attentive stenographers at the Brioni Plenum erased Ćosić’s letter from the record.”<sup>81</sup> Ćosić explained his reaction to news of Ranković’s “political liquidation” later, in the late 1980s<sup>82</sup>:

I was deeply convinced that such a liquidation of Ranković would lead to a schism not only in the party, but also in Yugoslavia,



that this did not concern a reckoning with police methods, but the compromising of Serbian communists as the gendarmerie of Yugoslavia and of Aleksandar Ranković as an unscrupulous powermonger.<sup>83</sup>

It is hard to say whether Ćosić's memory was sharpened by hindsight; it is certainly true that over time, he would develop an interpretation of Ranković's dismissal that emphasized Ranković's symbolic position as the Serbian policeman, persecuted because he was in fact a Serb; that focused on the unjustified fear of non-Serbian Yugoslav communists of a historical tendency to "hegemonism." At the meeting of June 28, Ćosić remembers demanding that Ranković be treated as a criminal, since the acts he was accused of were criminal acts. He also remembers declaring that "this concerns an attempt to compromise the Serbian communist movement, to place on it the burden of nationalism, hegemony, Stalinism, and all of those well-known attributes from the arsenal of party propaganda."<sup>84</sup> Ćosić says that he was warned by Petar Stambolić, Mijalko Todorović, and Milentije Popović—three veteran Serbian communists—not to make his opinions known publicly, because they would lead to his own political death.<sup>85</sup>

The years from 1961 to 1966 saw a precipitous decline in Dobrica Ćosić's faith in Tito and communism in Yugoslavia. Occupying a position about as influential and favored as any writer could hope for, nothing marked Ćosić as a regime writer so much as his status as literary surrogate for Tito in the Pirjevec debate in 1961. Ćosić would eventually give it up in disappointment over the changes that Tito implemented in Yugoslavia. While it has proved tempting to accuse Ćosić of "going nationalist" in the late 1960s, that is in fact not what happened. In truth, Ćosić remained consistent as his intellectual and ideological moorings shifted around him.

### THE END OF ĆOSIĆ'S PARTY ROMANCE

The most interesting and revealing book that Ćosić ever wrote is also the one that is least remembered: *A Fable* (Bajka). Without question the most provocative of his novels, it was virtually ignored at the time of its release in October 1966, in spite of its direct relevance to Ćosić's response to the fall of Aleksandar Ranković. Two possible rea-

sons for its lack of splash come to mind: one is that *A Fable* was a story of the fantastic which did not fit the mold in Serbian publishing in 1966, and a second is that its topicality was lost on Serbian elites who were unprepared for a writer like Ćosić to critique the social order in Yugoslavia in such an open and aggressive way. Nevertheless, it is impossible to understand Ćosić's frame of mind as Ranković was falling from power without examining the themes of *A Fable*.

*A Fable* is an anti-utopian fantasy that draws liberally from other books in that genre, including *A Brave New World* and *1984*. It tells the story of a man—known throughout only as “the man”—who awakens one morning to find that the world around him has been reduced to ash. The man enters a river, where he walks among the fish and vegetation until he comes upon a beautiful human called “Andjama,” a fallen angel, the devil. Verbal sparring ensues, resulting in the man's question, uttered in despair: what are man's limits? Andjama agrees to let the man in on the secret, so long as the man agrees to trade places with Andjama, taking the fallen angel's place pacing the riverbed for eternity. The man agrees. A three-part answer to the man's question ensues, as he is released into “The Museum,” “Kamonija,” and “Razistorija.”<sup>86</sup>

“The Museum” and “Kamonija” are not particularly novel examinations of the extremes men are capable of. “The Museum” portrays a world in which all knowledge is kept catalogued, where all thoughts are known and indexed. This is a world of concentration camps, prisons, crematoria, in which the good people are imprisoned and do not try to escape. Why not? Because they have hope and faith in humanity—“we always hoped that perhaps they would not take me there, maybe they would not burn anymore, maybe something would happen.”<sup>87</sup> Where “The Museum” is a horrible place defined by its prisons and ovens, “Kamonija” is pristine, the people by definition happy. “He” governs the people of Kamonija, who are constantly beset by the threat of the *antijevci*, the “antis,” the naysayers. If the Museum resembled the dark vision of the Nazis, Kamonija clearly reflects the terrifying optimism of Stalinism. Closed borders, enforced happiness, terms with inverted meanings, constant loyalty tests—all of the usual suspects are rounded up by Ćosić in his dissection of the truth behind the “happy future” promised by communism. Both the Museum and Kamonija feel rather run of the mill today, thanks to a half-century of examinations of their forms of evil.

But “Razistorija” is different. An eruption of quasars causes time to stand still; then, time begins to move backward. “Razistorija,” or the unravelling of history, begins, and all that has been constructed by man begins to deconstruct. When the future becomes the past, the concept of hope is called into question, for the future means hope. The bulk of the story of Razistorija concerns the details of the deconstruction of all that has come before and is rather deadening after a while. One of the more interesting features of Razistorija is the fact that people come back to life, then to populate the earth, since they do not disappear again once the time of their birth has passed. But when the reversal of time finally halts, the result is not (as it had been at the beginning) the stoppage of time, but the stoppage of everything. The narrator, for instance, is frozen on a moment when he said “my head is killing me.” The narrator’s conclusion: “Time dies. With time, all that I am dies too.”<sup>88</sup> The past and the future—his identity and his hope—no longer exist.

There are no easy conclusions regarding Razistorija, but there is also no doubt that Ćosić believed it to be important, one of his real contributions to literature and intellectual life in Serbia. He would make reference to it on many occasions thereafter, especially in the 1980s. Razistorija is a place in which the normal axes of human existence (past, future) no longer pertain; the human affect of the existence of a future is to give people hope; without hope, life ends. Razistorija is also there to remind us that we become less than nothing once our history has been undone. Thus, those who are brought back to life by the reversal of time become zombie-like, manipulable but without will or hope. Ultimately, though, Razistorija asks why we should care if life means to go forward and be jerked backward, only to end up immobilized. If there is nothing we can do or hope for, is our role to simply *be*? The concept of “Razistorija,” which Ćosić would revive in later decades, never caught on in any popular way, although one senses that Ćosić would have liked it to. Instead, it came to (only occasionally, and only by Ćosić) be used to describe that historical exhaustion that we hear pervades the peoples of Yugoslavia and the Balkans.

If no one else recognized that *A Fable* incorporated serious and seriously-intended criticism of the social and political order in Yugoslavia, Ćosić certainly did. Upon its publication in October 1966, he wrote that “the most uncertain, most meaningful of my books, *A Fable*,

has appeared. I can't know its fate. I feel like a mother who escorts her son to the front..."<sup>89</sup> His diaries include many references to the novel, which he understood to be a turning point in his work and to reflect an altered view of the Yugoslavia he had till then claimed to revere. "Reality has split me in two, demolished me. I identified myself so closely with the fate of the Partisan revolution that its results, dramas, and crises have overcome me," he remarked while finishing *A Fable*. "The leaders of the revolution entered a deep crisis long ago; they no longer have any creative power; they don't even have the strength to hide their own powerlessness and their political failures and stupidities."<sup>90</sup> *A Fable* marked a division in his literary work: *Divisions* had come immediately before it, and would be his last novel to work within the narrative limits endorsed by the regime; *Time of Death*, which would follow *A Fable*, would be his first to transcend those limits. The fact that he was finishing *A Fable* as Ranković fell is one of those perfectly-timed historical accidents.

## NOTES

- 1 Dobrica Ćosić, "Reč i delo istorije," in *Prilike*, 210.
- 2 Predrag Matvejević, *Razgovori s Miroslavom Krležom*. Fourth edition. (Zagreb: Liber, 1978) 8. Italics in original.
- 3 Marko Ristić, *Za svest, 1971–1977* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1977) 93.
- 4 Dobrica Ćosić, "Radni nalog našeg vremena," in *Prilike*, 200.
- 5 Dobrica Ćosić, "O pozivu pisca u socijalističkoj državi," in *Odgovornosti*, v. 2 of *Akcije* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966) 229.
- 6 Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919–1953*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 165.
- 7 Zoran Mišić, "Za jedinstveni Jugoslovenski kriterijum," in *Delo* (Belgrade) v. 2, no. 7 (1956).
- 8 Mišić's response to Drago Šega, a Slovene writer, is in Zoran Mišić, "Oko jedinstvenog Jugoslovenskog kriterijuma," in *Delo*, v. 3, no. 12 (1956) 1687–92; see also Peković, *Ni rat ni mir*, 242–45; Budding, "Serb Intellectuals and the National Question," 63–67. Reflective of the lack of clear direction from on high: Mišić, whose proposal appears to have been made to order for Petar Stambolić, was described as a *mangup* (thug) by Veljko Vlahović, Stambolić's colleague on the Ideological Commission, who objected to Mišić's modernist writings (AJ, CK-SKJ, Ideološka komisija, Zapisnik sa sastanka Ideološke komisije CK Jugoslavije na dan 3.II.1956 godine.)

- 9 *Yugoslavia's Way: The Program of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia* (New York: All Nations Press, 1958) Translated by Stoyan Pribechevich.
- 10 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 98.
- 11 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 142–43.
- 12 AJ, CK-SKJ, VII Kongres SKJ, I/VII-K.1/1–71.
- 13 AJ, CK-SKJ, VII Kongres SKJ, I/VII-K.1/1–71; meeting of February 27, 1958.
- 14 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)*, 143. Ćosić writes that “it was as if that person was the only one entrusted with and responsible for the thought and theory of the party which views itself as the ideological avant-garde of society.”
- 15 *Yugoslavia's Way* p. 192.
- 16 *Yugoslavia's Way* p. 193.
- 17 Ćosić, “O pozivu pisca u socijalističkoj državi,” 227.
- 18 Ćosić, “O pozivu pisca u socijalističkoj državi,” 228.
- 19 Ćosić, “O pozivu pisca u socijalističkoj državi,” 229.
- 20 Nikola Drenovac, *Pisci govore* (Belgrade: Grafos, 1964) 85.
- 21 Drenovac, *Pisci govore*, 87.
- 22 Drenovac, *Pisci govore*, 87–88.
- 23 Dobrica Ćosić, *Deobe* v. 1 (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966) 15.
- 24 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 13.
- 25 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 13.
- 26 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 13.
- 27 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 19.
- 28 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 107.
- 29 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 266.
- 30 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 274–75.
- 31 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 123.
- 32 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 2, 269.
- 33 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 1, 397.
- 34 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 2, 267–68.
- 35 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 2, 79.
- 36 Ćosić, *Deobe*, v. 2, 275–79. See Branimir Anzulović, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 131–33. Anzulović completely reverses the meaning of this passage.
- 37 On this polemic, see Dimitrij Rupel, *Od vojnog do civilnog društva* (Zagreb: Globus, 1990) 96–113. Jelena Milojković-Djurić, “Approaches to National Identities: Ćosić's and Pirjevec's Debate on Ideological and Literary Issues,” in *East European Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996) 63–73, is basic. Two of Ćosić's contributions to the polemic are in his collected works: “O savremenom nesavremenon nacionalizmu” and “Nacija, integracija, socijalizam,” in Ćosić, *Odgovornosti*, 18–85. Pirjevec's installments were republished as “Izvinite, kako ste rekli?” in *Delo* (Belgrade) v. 7, no. 12 (December 1961) 1396–99; “Slovenstvo, jugoslovenstvo, i socijalizam,”

- in *Delo* (Belgrade) v. 8, no. 1 (January 1962) 9–30; and “Odgovor Dobrici Ćosiću,” in *Delo* (Belgrade) v. 8, no. 4 (April 1962) 526–51; Ćosić’s final word, “Čitaocima,” can be found in *Delo* (Belgrade) v. 8, no. 5 (May 1962) 645–48.
- 38 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 125–26.
- 39 Ćosić, “O savremenom nesavremenom nacionalizmu,” 48.
- 40 Danilo Kiš’s biting poem “The Poet of the Revolution on the Presidential Yacht” begins with the words “Three-hundred white dress-shirts...not so that you won’t go naked, but because protocol demands...” Danilo Kiš, “Pesnik revolucije na predsedničkom brodu,” in Marinko Arsić Ivkov and Ivan Ivanović, *Čitanka srpske političke poezije* (Belgrade: Ivanović/Tadić, 1999) 95.
- 41 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 107–108.
- 42 Ćosić, “Reč i delo istorije,” 205–206.
- 43 Ćosić, “Reč i delo istorije,” 207.
- 44 Ćosić, “Reč i delo istorije,” 209.
- 45 Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948–1974* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977) 112.
- 46 Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, 136.
- 47 On the Eight Congress of the LCY, see Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, 165–72.
- 48 He says this in Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 135.
- 49 This initiative actually looked a lot like that of Zoran Mišić from 1955. Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 100.
- 50 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 100.
- 51 Dobrica Ćosić, “Udruživanje prema uverenjima, afinitetima, i idejama,” in *Književne novine*, no. 244 (March 6, 1965) 8.
- 52 Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade; Savez književnika Jugoslavije (hereafter, AJ-SkJ): F:2 (VI, VII, Vanredni Kongresi, 1961, 1964, 1965 g.) “Stenografske beleške SkJ VII Kongres—Titograd 24–26.IX.64 g.,” shows that the motion was signed by 15 Serbs, 19 others, plus 3 whose names are unreadable. The Serbs were Ćosić, Antonije Isaković, Sveta Lukić, Petar Džadžić, Matija Bečković, Brana Crnčević, Oskar Davičo, Aleksandar Tišma, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Bogdan Popović, Ivan Lalić, Dušan Simić, Branislav Petrović, Eli Finci, and Sreten Asanović. See also Sveta Lukić, *Savremena jugoslovenska literatura (1945–1965): Rasprava o književnom životu i književnim merilima kod nas* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1968) 148.
- 53 AJ-SkJ: F:14 Plenums of SkJ from 1961–1965; Sten. beleške: SkJ Plenum uprave 23.IX.64 Titograd (No. XXV). See also the notes from a meeting of the directorate of the UKS on February 21, 1965, at which there was considerable opposition to the Ćosić proposal; “Reorganizacija Saveza književnika?” in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) March 6, 1965, 8–9.
- 54 Lukić, *Savremena jugoslovenska literatura*, 148.
- 55 “Reorganizacija Savez književnika?” 8.

- 56 AJ SkJ: Savez književnika Jugoslavije: VII Kongres, Titograd, 1964, 187.
- 57 “Reorganizacija Savez književnika?” 8.
- 58 Dragan Jeremić, the president of the UKS, opposed Ćosić’s proposal, as did others on the board of the organization.
- 59 Dobrica Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije, ili o aktuelnostima naše savremene kulture,” in *Praxis*, no. 4/5 (1965) 519–34. Like most of what Ćosić had to say about the national question in Yugoslav culture, this article provoked a Slovenian response: in this case, Josip Vidmar. See Vidmar, “O našem šovinizmu,” in *O slovenstvu i jugoslavenstvu: Izbor iz radova* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986) 392–97. Vidmar accuses Ćosić of accusing him of being a narrow-minded nationalist.
- 60 Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije,” 522.
- 61 Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije,” 523.
- 62 Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije,” 524.
- 63 Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije,” 524.
- 64 Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije,” 527.
- 65 Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije,” 528.
- 66 Ćosić, “Zajedno i drugačije,” 528.
- 67 “Literatura u ostavci,” *Književne novine* (Belgrade) January 8, 1966, 1.
- 68 Dobrica Ćosić, “O modernizmu i realizmu, potom,” in *Prilike*, 259–60.
- 69 Dobrica Ćosić, “O Savezu književnika i drugom,” in *Prilike*, 264–65.
- 70 Lukić, *Savremena jugoslovenska literatura*, 154.
- 71 Several books were written in the late 1980s on the Ranković affair. Unless otherwise noted, I have taken the details from Jovan Kesar and Pero Simić, *LEKA: Aleksandar Ranković* (Belgrade: Biblioteka ‘Misterije politike,’ 1990).
- 72 Quoted in Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 55–56.
- 73 Quoted in Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 59.
- 74 It could not have been lost on the anti-Stalinist Yugoslav communists that Stalin had used the same means to consolidate his own power in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.
- 75 Quoted in Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 64.
- 76 Quoted in Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 72.
- 77 Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 92.
- 78 Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 103–4.
- 79 Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 104–5.
- 80 Kesar and Simić, *LEKA*, 115. By the 1980s, this quote had been altered in the popular imagination to read “I am ashamed to be a Serb,” which is of course a radically different thing than being “ashamed as a Serb” of particular behavior. See Zoran Sekulić, *Pad i čutnja Aleksandra Rankovića* (Belgrade: Dositej, 1989) photo section; Dobrica Ćosić later described an unnamed Serbian communist who said he was “ashamed that he was a Serb” following Deva’s presentation; Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 171. Slobodan Selenić reportedly said in 1989 that “[Slobodan] Milošević is

neither an accident nor a temporary unpleasantness, rather he is the first and only politician in the second Yugoslavia who said to the nation that he is not ashamed to be a Serb"; *Danas* (Belgrade) October 21/22, 2000 (Vikend 10).

- 81 Sekulić, *Pad i čutnja*, 67. One wonders why a letter that Tito allegedly only "mentioned to some members of the Central Committee of the SKJ at the Fourth Plenum" would have entered the stenographic record. Perhaps it was more dramatic for this author to have imagined that it was "erased," as part of a conspiracy to crush one Serbian voice.
- 82 The interviews from which this excerpt is drawn were given between 1987 and 1989.
- 83 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 161.
- 84 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 163.
- 85 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 164.
- 86 My attempts at faithfully translating this term have failed. "Razistorija" could mean "antihistory," "de-history," or even "unhistory," but none of those terms seems to capture its Ćosićean meaning, which is the unraveling of, or undoing of, history.
- 87 Dobrica Ćosić, *Bajka* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1988) 126.
- 88 Ćosić, *Bajka*, 359.
- 89 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)* 281.
- 90 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1951–1968)* 241.



## CHAPTER 4

# Drama and Politics: Mihiz in the Sixties

Whereas Ćosić inhabited the upper reaches of power in Yugoslavia, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz was banished from its margins to its backwoods. Following his flirtations with Djilasism and its namesake, he left his comfortable perch at *NIN* for the directorship of the Matica Srpska library, which he held from 1956 to 1960. By most accounts, he felt exiled, rather bitter, but nevertheless committed to his new position. He knew nothing about the job, but as a bibliophile and user of libraries, he found his way.<sup>1</sup> After 1960, he worked as an artistic advisor to Avala Film, the Belgrade film company. He had long loved the theater, and directed three plays between 1956 and 1963. Then, in February 1963, his own first play was performed. In *Banović Strahinja*, Mihiz dramatized one of the most well-known poems in the Serbian folk tradition, the story of Strahinić Ban, the lord of the small territory of Banjska, just northwest of modern Mitrovica.<sup>2</sup> Mihiz's interpretation was performed at the Yugoslav Drama Theater as the "first work of a contemporary Serbian writer performed on the main stage of the YDT."<sup>3</sup> The play was handed the prestigious Sterija Prize for Drama in 1963, in a competition that is still held each year.

Mihiz moved from criticism to drama because of his "innate inclination to the spoken word, to the divine and difficult phenomenon of dialogue which no other style can replace."<sup>4</sup> He was motivated to dramatize the poem "Banović Strahinja" by spite, according to Jovan Ćirilov, Serbia's preeminent drama critic.<sup>5</sup> Mihiz had been told by a friend that it was impossible to produce a good drama based on Serbian epic poetry because not enough was known about the world of medieval Serbia. "Without a realistic setting there is no true drama," Mihiz was told.<sup>6</sup> That did not deter Mihiz, who ignored the realistic setting (when he offered the play to the YDT, he demanded that the

main character, Jug Bogdan, be presented as “ordinary, and as visually conventional as possible”<sup>7</sup>), altered the focus of the poem’s plot, elevated the characters of Strahinić Ban’s wife and her father, Jug Bogdan, and allowed anachronisms to flourish (in a warning to the reader, Mihiz notes that “anachronisms in it are deliberate, even when they are incidental”), all in order to prove that one of Serbia’s best-known folk epics could be made relevant. Mihiz said that “the possibility of realizing the human behavior and powerful conflict of private (Strahinić Ban’s) and public (Jug Bogdan’s) humanism drew me personally.”<sup>8</sup> Also, the woman’s role in the play, and in all of Serbian epic poetry, seemed to him oversimplified.

The original “Banović Strahinja” tells the story of Strahinić Ban, the ruler of a small territory in Kosovo on the eve of the legendary Battle of Kosovo.<sup>9</sup> He has been called to Kruševac to consult with the other lords of the Serbian realm as the Ottoman armies gather on Kosovo plain. While visiting his in-laws, Jug Bogdan and his nine sons, in Kruševac, he gets word that his home has been ransacked, his mother beaten, and his wife kidnapped by the Ottoman vassal Vlah Alija. In the poem, dramatic tension surfaces between Strahinić Ban and Jug Bogdan, his wife’s father. Strahinić Ban wishes to take his nine brothers-in-law to rescue his wife, their sister, but Jug Bogdan will not allow it, as his daughter has already undoubtedly shamed them all by sleeping with Vlah Alija. Strahinić Ban goes alone to Goleč Mountain, where Vlah Alija is camped. In spite of the fact that his wife helps Vlah Alija (giving Strahinić Ban his only injuries), Strahinić Ban conquers Vlah Alija. In the end he goes “straight for the throat of the Turk, seizes that throat, he bites it with his teeth, and he kills him as a wolf kills a lamb.”<sup>10</sup> Strahinić Ban returns to Kruševac with his wife, where her brothers are ordered by Jug Bogdan to kill her for her shameful behavior. Strahinić Ban steps in and orders them to cease; he forgives his wife. The original poem indicates that Strahinić Ban did so for mercenary reasons. He did not wish to sever his ties with her family, the Jugović clan: “And then I would have no one with whom to drink. And so it is I forgive my true love.”<sup>11</sup>

The original poem focused on the despair of patriarchal values and on individual heroism, with literally no examination of the wife’s motives. In the original, Strahinić Ban’s mother reports the attack of Vlah Alija as follows:

He chased away all of your faithful servants,  
and so he brought grief to your old mother,  
he broke her bones under his horse's hooves,  
and took away your faithful wife, he did,  
and he took her off to Kosovo field.  
There he kisses your wife beneath his tent,  
and I, my son, wail in the burned-out home,  
the while you drink red wine in Kruševac.  
May that cursed wine bring the wrath upon you!<sup>12</sup>

In the poem, the wife is thus introduced as only the third in a line of material losses to Strahinić Ban, and no more reference is made to her until the very end, when she proves the mother right (she had indeed been kissed "beneath the tent"). In the poem, we know only that the wife eventually takes the side of her captor:

She quickly finds a bit of broken saber,  
she wraps it up in an embroidered scarf,  
for she would not injure her own white hand.  
And she follows this way now and that way,  
guarding the head of Turk Vlah Alija.  
And then she strikes at her former master,  
her own husband, the proud Strahinić Ban,  
right on the head, on the turban feather,  
and the turban, all wound around the head.  
She cuts in half the golden turban feather;  
she cuts straight through his own white-wound turban,  
makes a slight cut there on the hero's head.  
The blood begins to run down the ban's face,  
and to threaten to blind both of his eyes.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the character of the wife, whose act of treason sets in motion the drama of the poem, is a static figure who only appears twice, and in the most formulaic of postures.

Mihiz's adaptation shifts the drama from the relationship between Strahinić Ban and Jug Bogdan (where the wife's fate is decided) to the marriage of Strahinić Ban and his wife, unnamed in poem and play. Mihiz makes the wife's motivations the key to the plot. Before

Strahinić Ban leaves for Kruševac, his wife gives him a letter to give to her mother when he arrives. He reads it and begs her to wait for his return to deliver the letter. She agrees, but only Strahinić Ban and his wife know its contents. Thus he knows the tragic secret of her betrayal of him, which soon follows—for betrayal it is, in the play, without any ambiguity, and by her choice (she is not a captive; rather, she offers herself to Vlah Alija). Strahinić Ban's motivation for saving her, and then for not allowing her to be killed by her vengeful brothers, is removed from the folk epic's realm of the inscrutable and becomes part of a modern psychological drama. Near the end of Mihiz's play, we and the Jugovićeš discover the reason for the wife's betrayal. Her letter to her mother, kept secret till then by Strahinić Ban, reads:

I am writing you so that you know that I believe I owe nobody anything. I govern my own life, with which I will always do what I wish. Forgotten by my own and living among strangers, I have decided to interrupt this false situation of misunderstanding and to withdraw into a monastery. No, I do not do that out of an exaggerated piety, nor from the desire for peace (what would peace be to me?), nor from a deeply broken heart...I do it in order to inter, better and deeper, my failed and wrongly initiated life.<sup>14</sup>

Strahinić Ban is the only person, aside, perhaps, from Jug Bogdan, who understands his wife's twentieth-century emotions and motivations. Her brothers, Vojin and Boško certainly do not. Vojin coldly asks his father: "Are you convinced by our investigation to this point that this woman went off with the Turk and became his lover of her own free will? Please answer briefly and clearly."<sup>15</sup> Vojin, Boško, their mother, and Jug Bogdan decide her fate: for adultery, she shall have both nipples cut off; for treason, she shall be drawn and quartered.

Mihiz also animated the important but neglected character of Jug Bogdan, primarily with a wry sensibility that was not present in the original poem. In Mihiz's Jug Bogdan, who spews irony-laced speeches and intellectual asides, one hears the voice of the author. In place of the one dimensional character of the poem, whose only intemperate line comes when he demands that his sons "cut to pieces this vile bitch, your sister,"<sup>16</sup> Mihiz offers the viewer a father who follows the rules of a patriarchal society only because his own wife, a tradi-

tion-bound woman who never appears on stage, demands it. When Strahinić Ban returns to Kruševac with his wife, Vojin and Boško prepare her fate. Strahinić Ban steps in, proclaims that the decision is not theirs to make (for, by “the customs of our ancestors and the laws of our tsars,” he announces, “this woman is no longer a Jugović”<sup>17</sup>), and announces that she can return to their modest home in Banjska. Jug Bogdan is asked by his oldest son Vojin, who most believed that his sister should die, whether he is “now happy.” Jug Bogdan responds, “I am not happy, Vojin, no. But less unhappy, by all means. You know, not much remains to me, and to lose more would be hard on me.”<sup>18</sup> Jug Bogdan has travelled quite a distance from poem to play.

The poem “Banović Strahinja” leaves much to the imagination; it does not provide a clear answer to the question why Strahinić Ban forgave his wife. Mihiz modernized the story by describing a heroism that no longer derived from the hero’s martial qualities and compassion, but from his recognition that individuals do not conform to set patriarchal patterns. He introduced ambiguity into human behavior, and was thus absolved of the need to explain anything absolutely. In writing the play, Mihiz said that the woman’s role in all of Serbian epic poetry seemed to him “totally simplified, vulgar, and fundamentally scornful.” Mihiz felt compelled to show that “such a hero [as Strahinić Ban] would show such understanding for the dark impulse behind the sin of a woman.”<sup>19</sup> Mihiz wished to “transform a story about heroism into a drama of treason, forgiveness, sin, prejudice, and the impossibility of judging.”<sup>20</sup> The original poem did not attempt to examine the wife’s motivations and therefore allowed only for the odd ritual embedded in Strahinić Ban’s final resolution.

In 1966, Mihiz’s second play, *Komandant Sajler*, was published. Although the setting was radically different from that of *Banović Strahinja*, both were historical and both dealt with the individual entrapped by conditions—in *Banović Strahinja*’s case, social conventions, in *Komandant Sajler*, ideological commitment. *Komandant Sajler* was set in a town in the Banat on September 13 and 14, 1941. Wilhelm Sajler, a captain in the SS, was the perfect Nazi specimen (“Height: Tall. Color of Hair: Blond. Color of eyes: dark blue. Nose: straight. Face: Longish. Racial origins checked to the fourth generation.”).<sup>21</sup> Sajler also happened to have been born in that same town in the Banat, the son of *Volskdeutsch* parents. He fell in love with Jelena, a

Serbian girl, but then left his home at the age of eighteen to study law in Vienna. He soon joined the National Socialist Party, finding a new love: "it was not a woman, it was love for my German nation. A complete, total love, love without reserve and without exception."<sup>22</sup> When the war began, he fought in Poland and then on the western front. In war-torn Serbia, he came home to head the military administration of his occupied hometown. There his past confronts him.

His first test comes in the form of a request from his own brother, Feri, that an old friend of their family, a Jew named Melchior Weiss, be allowed to flee to Switzerland to avoid deportation. Komandant Sajler does not allow Weiss, who had funded his own education, to flee, ordering him arrested immediately. His second test is his old girlfriend Jelena, who is married now to a Serbian doctor who has just been arrested. Jelena approaches him to ask for mercy; Sajler pronounces himself unable and unwilling to help, since her husband is a local communist party leader. "My honor does not allow it," he tells her.<sup>23</sup> Her husband would be shot that night. When Jelena attempts and fails to shoot Sajler in his office, he shows some compassion by telling his assistant that he himself had accidentally fired a shot from his own revolver.

Sajler's final test offers more of a challenge: he discovers that he is actually the son of Melchior Weiss, the Jew he had just ordered arrested. Weiss, Sajler finds out, had gotten his mother pregnant and then asked Sajler's father, Karl, to marry her and raise the child as his own. After melodramatic, imagined nighttime confrontations with his various interlocutors, Komandant Sajler determines his only possible fate: he will pay, he tells a colleague, "as the fate of blood has ordained. Arrest me, take me to the camp for Jews, and I will enjoy the fate of the Jew."<sup>24</sup> That he is then murdered by the colleague does not change the fact that he had remained loyal to his own convictions, his honor intact. *Komandant Sajler* did not achieve the same heights as *Banović Strahinja*, although it, unlike its predecessor, was performed outside of Yugoslavia, in Austria, where it could have been expected to create a stir.

Mihiz undoubtedly considered *Komandant Sajler* a frank reckoning with the evil that was Nazism, but it is unsubtle. Willi Sajler is evil, and an ideologue whose behavior consists of the crudest caricatures. *Komandant Sajler* was written in the full confidence that the (German, Nazi) people described were truly different: Mihiz would never have

acknowledged that the sort of evil that he described might be found within himself or his people. He looked at the evil in “others” rather than the evil within us all. Not that Mihiz should at that point have searched his own soul—*Komandant Sajler* appeared at a point when nationalisms were again on the rise within Yugoslavia. In particular, the Croatian Spring, which began in 1967 and lasted through 1971, was about to arrive, and Serbs would once again perceive themselves to be victims of other people’s nationalism. Mihiz’s written reckoning with the nationalism of others rendered him supremely confident of their grounding when it came time to deal with Croatian nationalism. He soon had his chance.

#### A ‘GROUP OF WRITERS’ REDEFINES SERBIA

On March 31, 1967, as a member of the communist writers’ *aktiv*, Antonije Isaković was called before the City Committee of the League of Communists of Belgrade. That committee wished to discuss a recent foray into public life by the Serbian Writers’ Association, in the form of a document that came to be known as the “Proposal for Consideration” (*Predlog za razmišljanje*).<sup>25</sup> Mihiz, the other co-author of the document, but not a member of the League of Communists, would be spared inquisition for a few more days. But Isaković, a member of the party since the Second World War and an acclaimed short story author, was also a member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, and the head of the Prosveta publishing house. Until now, the League of Communists had had little cause to question his credentials, loyalty, or adherence to the party line.<sup>26</sup> But the Belgrade City Committee had already deemed the Proposal for Consideration an outrageous attack on brotherhood and unity only somewhat less infuriating than its Croatian predecessor, the “Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language” (*Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskoga književnog jezika*). Since the Proposal was a product of the Serbian milieu, the Belgrade City Committee had to clean up the mess, according to the obdurate logic of Titoism, which dictated that nationalist excesses be addressed by the same national party leadership. Isaković bowed uncomfortably before this authority, although he had some difficulty understanding the uproar.

The Declaration, to which the Proposal was a response, was issued by nineteen Croatian institutions and signed by 130 people (80 of them party members, including Miroslav Krleža), on March 15, 1967, and sent to the federal parliament as a petition on the same day.<sup>27</sup> The Declaration made two demands of the federal government. First, in place of the usual formulation that held that in Yugoslavia there were three official literary languages ("Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian," Slovenian, and Macedonian), the constitution should be amended to read that there were four: Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian. In other words, the practice of considering Serbian and Croatian a single language should be ended, with the status of "literary language" now accorded to both Serbian and Croatian. Second, the Declaration demanded "the consistent use of the Croatian literary language in the schools, the press, the public and political forums, on radio and the television networks whenever the broadcasts are directed to a Croatian audience." Furthermore, "officials, teachers, and public workers, irrespective of their origin, should use in their official dealings the language of the milieu in which they live."

These demands broke recently established precedent in Yugoslavia, which held that Serbian and Croatian were the same language, divided only by "stylistic differences" which rendered them, at most, two variants. That precedent was established in 1954 following negotiations between Serbian and Croatian literary figures and linguists, in the so-called Novi Sad Agreement, which gave the language a name, "Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian," which was designated one language "with two pronunciations, ijekavian and ekavian."<sup>28</sup> Other differences that existed between the two forms of Serbo-Croatian were bartered out of common usage, other negotiations were planned for a common orthography (finally produced in 1960), and "Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian" became a potential living language. The Novi Sad Agreement became state policy, and schooling, publishing, and broadcasting followed its lead. The federal constitution and all documents of state referred consistently to the language in question as "Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian," which was cumbersome but the only compromise which respected the equality of the two versions of the language, and equality was a fundamental requirement of Tito's communist governance of Yugoslavia, even at the cost of cultural logic and historical continuity. Authorities in Croatia would use ijekavian,



while in Belgrade ekavian would be the official form. The Novi Sad Agreement was an act of human cultural engineering, designed to create a unified language where none previously existed.

Engineering or not, the agreement became one of the cultural foundations of Tito's Yugoslavia. As with most of the cultural engineering projects in Yugoslavia to that point, Serbs were most content with this one because it promised to protect their divided community—as did, for instance, the notion of a supranational socialist Yugoslavism. In this case, they found refuge from one potential form of aggressive assimilation by one of their neighbors, the Croats. The Novi Sad Agreement might have lacked legitimacy, but it did have authority, and it did rather heavy-handedly assure that in Croatia or Bosnia Serbs would never have to learn and/or speak a language called “Croatian,” and this was important to a people who had been subjected to a genocidal policy by a Croatian government during World War II. But the signatories of the Declaration argued that with Belgrade as the center of the federal government, the Serbian form of the language had gained predominance as a de-facto state language: “the Croatian literary language is disregarded and is reduced to the status of a local dialect.” So, according to the Declaration, the Novi Sad Agreement actually had produced an actively anti-Croatian situation—namely, it was “possible in practice to circumvent, distort, and violate these [Novi Sad] principles within the broader distortions of our social and economic reality.” Those “distortions” included the conspiracy headed by Ranković, so recently uncovered by progressive forces: “the circumstances under which statism, unitarism, and hegemony have been revived are well known.” It did not help that in 1966, a dictionary by one Miloš Moskovljević was published in Belgrade entitled *Rečnik srpskohrvatskog književnog jezika s jezičkim savetnikom*.<sup>29</sup> This dictionary offended Croats, with good reason, as it rejected Croatian forms and raised Serbian usages to the level of standards for the entire “Serbo-Croatian” literary language. Then, in 1967, the first two volumes of the dictionary envisioned by the Novi Sad Agreement appeared; they also tended to devalue standard Croatian words and phrases.

In justifying their demand that the Croatian language be considered a literary language equal to Serbian, the formulators of the Declaration invoked arguments that did not overtly challenge Tito's national settlement in Yugoslavia but nonetheless portended ill for the

future of that settlement: "The principle of national sovereignty and complete equality [which was integral to Tito's communism] encompasses the right of each of our nations to protect all the attributes of its national identity and to fully develop not only its economy but also its culture," they wrote.

Among these attributes, the national name of the language spoken by Croats is of paramount importance, because it is the inalienable right of every people to call its language by its own national name [such a right was *not* integral to Tito's communism], irrespective of whether in a philological sense this language is shared in its entirety or through a separate variant by another people.

These assertions placed the rights of a Croatian nation above those of the collective population of Yugoslavia, whose "brotherhood and unity" should have taken precedence over the needs and desires of individual ethnic groups within the state. Brotherhood and unity were, in turn, conceptually assured by the mechanism of formal equality in Yugoslav law. The Novi Sad Agreement imposed that unity on the linguistic plane. By disingenuously attacking the Novi Sad Agreement, the Declaration stormed one of the cultural foundations of stability in Tito's Yugoslavia.<sup>30</sup> The document was signed by representatives of the Matica hrvatska, the Croatian Writers' Society, the language and literature departments of the Universities in Zagreb and Zadar and of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, and other organizations, totalling nineteen.

The sentiments that gave birth to the Declaration were not new or too surprising, and they were not as dangerous as the fact that they were expressed outside the normal channel of party forums. Tito's Yugoslavia was constructed around a series of self-fulfilling prophecies, and all was well as long as no one questioned them. The crime of the signatories of the Declaration was that they unilaterally repudiated and publicly frustrated one of Tito's prophecies: in this case, that Serbs and Croats would get along if provided formal equality. The Declaration was therefore greeted by a quick and harsh response across Yugoslavia. The response of the League of Communists was straightforward: it proclaimed the Declaration an attempt to destroy the brotherhood and unity of the Serbs and Croats. The Declaration,

however, also moved many of Serbia's leading literary lights to action, albeit of a different sort. The "Proposal for Consideration," drawn up during a meeting of the Serbian Writers' Association, remains somewhat mysterious, largely because it was unofficial and less widely disseminated. But the sentiments that informed its creation were just as deeply felt and potentially destructive as those which led to the issuance of the Declaration. Where the Declaration's fruits were meant to be enjoyed immediately, however, the Proposal's warning would take some time to mature.

Of some 300 writers present at the meeting of the Serbian Writers' Association on March 19 when the Proposal was presented, 42 signed (the authors were known as "a group of writers"). Twenty-one of them were members of the League of Communists.<sup>31</sup> Mihiz claimed to have been instrumental in drawing up the response to the Declaration, Isaković is credited with having been another main author, and Zoran Gavrilović, a literary critic, appears to have presented it to the membership of the Serbian Writers' Association for its consideration. Some have claimed that the Proposal was meant as black humor, but if so, it still included a real warning for the Croats and those who would agree with their position.<sup>32</sup> There was no sarcasm in the group's characterization of the Declaration as a "significant and epoch-making document"; the group of writers concurred that the institutions that issued the Declaration were "competent ones in matters pertaining to the Croatian literary language"; these Serbs therefore declared the Novi Sad Agreement void. But the group's quick acknowledgement that the Declaration reflected the "legitimate and inalienable right of each nation to make decisions regarding the name and position of its own language" indicated that this group of Serbs, who could not have been expected to acknowledge any such thing in Tito's Yugoslavia without long and serious discussions, had prepared their own bombshell.

The Proposal responded to the most ominous attribute of the Declaration, which was not its claim to a separate literary language for Croats, but the assertion that that language should become official on the territory of the Socialist Republic of Croatia; in other words, its linkage of a national attribute to a piece of land. The Serbian response hinted that the equation of nations with territory could establish a messy precedent.

Our Constitution guarantees to all our nationalities and minorities the right to an independent development of language and culture... The group of writers demands that the following regulations be stipulated in the Constitutions of the Socialist Republic of Serbia and the Socialist Republic of Croatia guaranteeing to all Croats and Serbs: The right to a scholastic education in their own languages and scripts according to their national programs, the right to use their national languages and scripts in their dealings with all authorities, the right to found their cultural societies, local museums, publishing houses and newspapers, in short, the right to cultivate unobstructedly and freely all aspects of their national culture.

So here was the implicit threat: if Croats were to insist that their nation had the right to define its own language, which then must be used on the territory of Croatia, Serbs could claim the same right, which would result in their linguistic secession from the Croatian republic. Never mind that the Serbs of Croatia largely spoke the same “literary language” (ijekavian) as the Croats. The point that the “group of writers” wished to make was that once national rights were linked with territory in this Yugoslavia, the grotesque logic of secession (whether geopolitical or cultural) could leave the state a tattered patchwork of national sectors, or as they came to be called in actual practice twenty-five years later, cantons.

As mentioned earlier, it was not just the substance of the arguments in the Declaration and the Proposal that roused opposition, it was the fact that proper form had not been followed, that unilateral declarations had been offered without consultation, that the Novi Sad Agreement—a foundation of Tito’s ethnic settlement, of brotherhood and unity in Yugoslavia—had been undermined, no matter the truth or logic embodied in the Declaration or the Proposal. After all, the next few years would see the Declaration’s demands become quiet precedents. The whole issue might have been allowed to go away on March 25, when Zoran Gavrilović sent a letter in the name of the “group of writers” who signed the Proposal to the board of the Serbian Writers’ Association, with which the group pronounced its missive “superfluous” following the announcement of the signatory institutions of the Declaration that they withdrew their support from that document.<sup>33</sup>

Aside from that, a couple of signatories who were employed by the weekly *NIN* sent letters to the City Committee claiming that they had been hoodwinked into signing the Proposal.<sup>34</sup> In spite of the “group’s” retraction (which was not in the least a disavowal of the Proposal’s contents), on March 31, 1967, the Belgrade City Committee met with the communist writers’ *aktiv*, which included half of the signatories of the Proposal.<sup>35</sup> The meeting was opened by Latinka Perović, the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, who noted that the public uproar over the Declaration and the Proposal had surprised many people, but that nationalist excesses had to be nipped in the bud, as the recent Ranković affair had illustrated. The offensive was taken up by Marko Ristić, who described the Proposal as “a poorly thought-out action,” and Mladen Oljača (a much lesser literary light), who declared that the two proclamations were “political twins...two fingers of the same hand, both of which need to be cut off.”<sup>36</sup> Ristić naively thought that the best course of action would be to disseminate the Proposal as widely as possible so that all the public could see just what this “group of writers” was up to.

Others who spoke at this meeting of communists described the strange atmosphere that pervaded the gathering at the Serbian Writers’ Association the week before: Ivan Ivanji portrayed it as a place in which “a person could not get the floor, and if he did, it turned into a burlesque.”<sup>37</sup> Vukašin Mićunović shared that judgment, attributing the circus-like atmosphere to Mihiz, whom Mićunović identified as the ringleader of the group of writers. For example, Mićunović described one scene at the UKS meeting: “Turning to some members of the association during a break, Mihiz asked the question: ‘Do you know which is the biggest Serbian city?’ and not waiting for an answer, himself said: Jasenovac.”<sup>38</sup> But Mihiz was not a party member, and he could not defend himself (if he wished to) at this meeting. Here, before the City Committee, communists were given the opportunity to justify their acts. Most of them chose contextualization as their main defense. As Isaković put it, “there is one very important detail: *that a certain amount of time has passed since then*. Thus, if we want to evaluate and see what the ‘Proposal for Consideration’ was, we need to... return to the situation and atmosphere when that project appeared.”<sup>39</sup> Isaković meant that, given no warning, and seeing no interpretation

of the Declaration in the press for some time, the signatories of the Proposal believed the Declaration to have been approved by the party, and thus deserving the respect of the public and a serious response by Serbian writers. The Proposal was merely the logical "consequence of the aforementioned Declaration."<sup>40</sup> Isaković obviously referred to the Proposal's demand that Serbs in Croatia receive the same right to choose their language as the Croats claimed. In spite of Isaković's assertion of propriety, it is difficult to accept that the Proposal's formulators intended their suggestion to be anything but a direct threat. Nonetheless, this basic defense was put forth by most who felt the need to defend themselves. Isaković also offered a weak second line of defense, intriguing if only because it resembled an argument that would be revived under changed conditions nearly twenty years later regarding another "proposal" put forth by Serbian intellectuals (again led by Isaković), the "Memorandum of the Serbian Academy": "I insist here that that was a proposal for thought, that it was presented to the organization at its Assembly, that the proposers at that time wanted the Assembly of writers to discuss the Proposal...that was just a suggestion, in no way a definitive text, but a project about which there would have been discussion in two weeks, at the plenum which had then been scheduled."<sup>41</sup> As would be the case two decades later, this defense of the Proposal is no defense at all, because it implies that the basic sentiments embodied in the document were not shared by the signatories, which of course was not the case.

Unlike Isaković, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, the other of the Proposal's coauthors, did not have to prostrate himself before any party committee, as he was not a member of the party. Mihiz understood the uproar over the Proposal, and he probably enjoyed it, as he was untouched by the sensibilities of the League of Communists and had no emotional ties to the policies that the LCY pursued. Along with other signatories, Mihiz was called upon to explain himself when the Serbian Writers' Association met three days after the City Committee meeting, on April 2, 1967.<sup>42</sup> Here the goal of the party, and thus of the leadership of the Writers' Association, seems to have been to convince or coerce as many signatories as possible to withdraw their signatures. This would be in keeping with the general tendency of Yugoslavia's communist leaders to demand adherence to the proper forms, even if proper form hid a more frightening reality. Two writers from *NIN*, as

we know, withdrew their signatures immediately, as did several others before the City Committee meeting. Others responded variously, but not all that predictably.

One party member announced that he had signed “out of Serbian spite,” but he also claimed that as a communist, he followed the lead of Isaković, a member of the Central Committee. Zoran Gavrilović asserted that the public uproar was exaggerated: “We are accused of chauvinism, which is a scandal, because everyone knows what Serbian chauvinism is. Respectable writers are nailed to a pillar of shame. They are identified with the forces defeated at the Brioni plenum, with the signatories of the Declaration.” Gavrilović made an important point: the signatories had carefully distanced themselves from the routine anti-Serbian accusations of “unitarism,” “hegemonism,” “centralism” and the like by matching the Croats blow for particularist blow: demanding that Croatia be cantonized was hardly the typical centralist solution, and not one ever associated with Aleksandar Ranković, the ranking “chauvinist” in Yugoslav iconography in 1967. Two men who often were explicitly linked to Ranković and Serbian nationalist positions, *Jež* colleagues Matija Bećković and Brana Crnčević, refused to acknowledge the validity of the pursuit of chauvinists; Crnčević was, according to the author of the article, “unable to convince those present of the reasons for his participation in an action which was directed against the brotherhood and unity of our peoples.” Finally, Mihiz, according to this official version of the meeting, conceded that he “actively participated” in the creation of the Proposal. He also rather meekly added that he was “convinced that the right to a mistaken opinion is more important than the right to infallibility.” Mihiz would never again acknowledge that he had held a “mistaken opinion.” Perhaps *Politika* wrote what the party wanted to hear from Mihiz; perhaps he actually said his opinion was mistaken. In any case, other sources tell us that Mihiz rejected the notion that he represented any sort of chauvinism or unitarism:

In the desire to protect at any cost my dignity as a man and a writer...I announce that I cannot and will not discuss the essence of these problems under such assumptions and in such an atmosphere....I have never, not once, taken part in any nationalistic or chauvinistic discussion in public. I could list a thousand examples

to the contrary. I am not doing that. One will be sufficient, I think: my last drama [*Komandant Sajler*] was written in fact as a protest against fanatical nationalism.<sup>43</sup>

Mihiz's memory of the atmosphere at this meeting: "The customary atmosphere of ideological condemnation, this time raised high because of the meaning of the public scandal, threatens to grow into a pogrom. The true believers attack insolently. The accused, those of weak disposition and little courage, repent and withdraw their signatures."<sup>44</sup> Mihiz did not withdraw his signature. He called on *Komandant Sajler* as evidence for his ability to recognize nationalism. Thus Willi Sajler insulated Mihiz from introspection—if not from the attacks of others. This was, and would remain, a typical Serbian response to accusations of nationalism through the wars of Yugoslav succession in the 1990s. *Others* were nationalists; Serbs respond defensively, but never nationalistically.

Mihiz continued his story (twenty years later) with a heroic account of the behavior of his friend Brana Crnčević, this time at the expense of the ubiquitous Marko Ristić. At some point in the meeting at Francuska 7, Mihiz claims that Ristić rose in the first row and pronounced that "this is no proposal, nor is it for consideration. If they knew what they were doing they would never have proposed it. It is a resolution. An open and poisonous, nationalistic, counter-revolutionary resolution." Crnčević then "looked scornfully at the 'revolutionary' and turned to the meeting. 'You demand of me that I withdraw my signature?! I would do that for you if you really wanted me to. But, good people, if I withdraw my signature, what will I sign with in the future? Not likely with the name Marko Ristić?!'"<sup>45</sup> Given that these recollections are pretty heroic, perhaps the words that Mihiz placed in the mouth of Jug Bogdan are appropriate reminders of the dangers of relying on one's own memory:

As soon as a man begins to write about himself, even somehow against his own will, it is as if he becomes an iconographer. He begins to deform, corrupt, stylize. All sketches become solemn, each banal sin comes out somehow highlighted, minor virtues become exceptional, and of itself a halo begins to glow around the author's head.<sup>46</sup>



The record shows that the majority of the signatories of the Proposal, whether they rescinded their signatures or not, openly feared, and justifiably resented, being associated with “unitarism” and its variants, all identified with Ranković, whose fall was still quite recent. Two examples stand out from the crowd, though. Mira Alečković, for instance, signed the Proposal, but withdrew her signature when she realized that it would be maliciously taken as support for Rankovićean unitarism. But oddly, Antonije Isaković actually allowed for the possibility that he *was* a unitarist: “Perhaps, and I recognize this, as a Serb I have tendencies and desires [associated with] a unitaristic complex.” He went on to explain, however, that any sort of subterranean Serbian unitarism would need more than one meeting like this one to be eradicated.<sup>47</sup> In Isaković’s case, acceptance of the accusation of unitarism may have been a simple product of the reflex that came with long-standing obedience to the party.

What ought to be clear enough to any observer whose vision is not clouded by the rigid iconography of the Tito regime is that the Proposal was a direct complement to the Declaration and was in no way unitaristic. Some believe the Proposal to have been an ironic shot across the bow, meant only as a tongue-in-cheek warning. Other investigators do not concede that the Proposal is ironic, however, and for these observers the Proposal represents a real sea-change in the way that Serbian intellectuals approached the national question. There are certainly moments of supreme sarcasm in the Proposal, but they do not render the entire document, or its vital point, irrelevant. That point: that Serbia’s intellectuals might have moved away from support, whether conditional or unconditional, of the Tito regime’s one assurance of their safety in this Yugoslavia, which was support for the noble goal of the creation of a unified culture, a supranational identity that would eventually render republican borders meaningless in national terms. Now, under growing evidence that this noble dream no longer animated Yugoslav political and cultural life, those same Serbs began a great withdrawal, from a form of Yugoslavism to a frantic attempt to rescue that which was Serbian from the wreckage. If so, this was a turning point as important as Ćosić’s abandonment of the party would be, a year later. In fact, the behavior of Serbian writers in 1967 can be seen as a form of acknowledgment of the failure of Ćosić’s proposal for literary reorganization from 1964–65.

As a result of the Declaration/Proposal crisis, many Croats and not a few Serbs were expelled from the League of Communists, and still more were fired from their jobs. Among them was Miroslav Krleža, who resigned his position as a member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia, Antonije Isaković, who did the same in Serbia on April 19, 1967. Mihiz, a founding and regular member of a committee of five who decided the *NIN* award for novel of the year (along with Velibor Gligorić, Milan Bogdanović, Eli Finci, and Zoran Mišić), claimed that he was removed from that committee after the award was given in 1968, allegedly because of his role in the Proposal crisis. (However, this does not appear to be true—*NIN* itself records that he remained on that jury through the award for 1970, given in 1971.<sup>48</sup>) Serbia's two leading satirists, Dušan Radović and Brana Crnčević, were fired by various media employers (Crnčević from *Borba*, both, plus Matija Bećković, from *Večernje novosti*). Bećković, whose fame was to grow to astounding proportions in the 1980s, was at this point a young television writer, poet, and humorist for *Žež*. Long known for his egocentrism, Bećković aggressively defended himself in a 1968 interview in *Književne novine*.<sup>49</sup> This was merely the newest in a line of persecutions suffered by the young writer, however, who had also been fired from an earlier job with Radio-Television Belgrade for allegedly being a supporter of Ranković. Bećković attributed his persecution to the fact that his father had been a Četnik.<sup>50</sup> Bećković is an early example of the type of response that many Serbian intellectuals would embrace as they came into ever more conflict with the regime.

I do not recognize secret judgments behind upholstered doorways. I do not recognize such policy as legal....I do not agree that I have said what they say I have said. I do not recognize injustice as the final word of justice. I do not recognize blind men as art critics... On the contrary, surrounded by hochstadlers, yellow-bellies, idiots, and cowards, a normal person has to admire himself all the more!<sup>51</sup>

There is no question that Bećković, Crnčević, and Mihiz came out of the Declaration/Proposal crisis with blackened reputations as Serbian nationalists. Whereas communists like Gavrilović and Isaković could be easily forgiven (and easily and formulaically punished, as party

members) for their desire to remind Croats that Serbs should “enjoy the same rights” as they did, Gavrilović himself was heard to put Bečković, Crnčević, and Mihiz in a separate category, motivated by other, darker, desires, and thus irredeemable.<sup>52</sup> But, according to the testimony of one contemporary, the very same Mihiz could also be described for the very same acts as “the pride of Serbia.”<sup>53</sup> Surely a divide was growing in Serbian society.

Dobrica Ćosić was still on the state’s side of that divide. Those who have been tempted to group Ćosić with “nationalists” after the mid-1960s—and there have been many—should note that Ćosić rejected the Proposal as representing that which he most despised in Serbian national politics: provincialism. Asked about the Declaration and the Proposal, he reiterated that he was “a follower of humanistic internationalism and socialist Yugoslavism, that Yugoslavism which is described in the Program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia as a principle and a socialist goal of national politics in the Yugoslav community...” and thus opposed to both proclamations. But Ćosić again asserted that “some who are most responsible for carrying out” that socialist policy “were suppressing it.”<sup>54</sup> While Ćosić condemned both documents as “defeats for intellectuals in Croatian and Serbian culture, in complex relations of social forces,” he did come down somewhat harder on the Croats. He recognized that the linguistic issue was less important than the fact that the Declaration “expresses a political conception in the Socialist Republic of Croatia.” The Declaration represented “a political tendency in contemporary Croatian culture, which, among other things, de-facto denies or suppresses the right of Serbs...to call their language Serbian.” Ćosić went on to equate this new type of Croatian nationalism, which “is obviously on the offensive and growing,” with “old, Great Croatian nationalism.”<sup>55</sup> Again, Ćosić’s concerns were expressly political and had nothing to do with linguistics. His condemnations of the Proposal, somewhat weaker than of the Declaration, nonetheless cut to the true heart of the matter: “the negative political, non-linguistic, contents of the ‘Proposal’ are in its immediate and easy acceptance of the destruction of the literary agreement between Croats and Serbs...which suggests the old, *srbijanski*<sup>56</sup> conception of Serbdom, which further supports Serbian nationalism...”<sup>57</sup>

That “*srbijanski*” nationalism, which imagined the Serbian nation in quite narrow terms, was not at all akin to the “unitarism” with

which Serbs were normally chastised. As we shall see, Ćosić found this narrow Serbianism limiting, and would spend much of his later career combating it. But, equally important, Ćosić was quite wrong. The Proposal was not in the least *srbijanski*. What made Mihiz and his Proposal colleagues unique was that they were neither narrowly *srbijanski* nor idealistically Yugoslav. Sure, they had acted against the principles of the literary agreements at Vienna and Novi Sad, but they had most definitely not restricted themselves to a narrow, *srbijanski*, national idea. Instead they were proponents of a Serbian idea that was expansive, but not Yugoslav. It would protect all Serbs, but as Serbs, not as members of a supra-nation. This was novel.

Now, in 1967, when Antonije Isaković, Zoran Gavrilović, and other Serbian party members signed on to the Proposal, they claimed to have done so because they believed that the Declaration was formally approved by the party itself. The fact that the party had not approved the Declaration then left these signatories of the Proposal with a way out, an explanation for their inexplicable behavior. But the ultimate irony, and one that many of the Serbs undoubtedly feared but suspected, was that the Croats, while they did not yet have party approval, would be allowed to continue down the path blazed by the Declaration. Between the 1967 uproar and the 1971 Croatian Spring, Croatian cultural institutions, linguists, and literary figures fulfilled the promise of the Declaration by withdrawing from all of the collaborative enterprises first promised in the Novi Sad Agreement. As in other similar situations—including the Ćosić–Pirjevec debate, the reform of the Serbian Writers' Association, and the economic reform—what had been the party *linija*, and not surprisingly was considered the “Serbian side,” had precedent and even implicit promises by the regime to rely on, but now the situation had changed. Serbs could dig in their heels, but Croats merely had to wait for the winds to shift.

In the aftermath of the Declaration/Proposal affair, the third volume of the joint dictionary envisioned by the Novi Sad Agreement appeared. Leading Croatian linguists rejected all of the volumes as giving precedence to Serbian forms, which reflected a “unitaristic viewpoint.”<sup>58</sup> Then, in November 1970, the Matica Hrvatska abandoned collaboration with the Matica Srpska, which proceeded to publish the remaining three volumes on its own. Just as the collapse of the Croatian Spring as an active movement in 1971 would precede

the victory of many of its aims in the 1974 constitution, the condemnation of the Declaration in 1967 did not spell the end of a separate Croatian language. As Robert Greenberg has noted, the 1974 constitution codified tolerance of “republican” norms of Serbo-Croatian designated “standard linguistic idioms.”<sup>59</sup> Succeeding years were filled with polemics, largely led by Pavle Ivić for the Serbs and Dalibor Brozović for the Croats. Ivić, who was part of the Simina 9a collective, published a controversial study in 1972 entitled *The Serbian People and Their Language* (Srpski narod i njegov jezik), which embodied his new approach to the language question, post-Declaration.<sup>60</sup> Ivić’s attitude reflected that of the signatories of the Proposal for Consideration:

If one partner does not wish unity, it is upon us to turn his attention to the consequences, but not to forbid it. No matter how much we are convinced that it is harmful, we can only mourn, but not impose ourselves. However, this presupposes one thing: that the confirmation of the right of one nation to its own language, given the eventual split of the association, dare not include the negation of the same right of another nation to its own language. That is all that remains for us to say.<sup>61</sup>

Ivić’s withdrawal from universalism—as reflected in his retreat from the Novi Sad Agreement to a narrower Serbianism—fulfilled the prophecies of the Proposal for Consideration and, as we shall see, the development of the ideas of the other Siminovci.

### KRALJEVIĆ MARKO STRUGGLES WITH POWER

In 1969, the third of Mihiz’s historical plays, *Kraljević Marko*, was performed at the Yugoslav Dramatic Theater, to much less fanfare than the earlier *Banović Strahinja* or even *Komandant Sajler*. Kraljević Marko is the most popular single figure in the Serbian folk tradition; in fact, however, the historical Marko Mrnjavčević was an Ottoman vassal, hardly the stuff of heroic legend. Mihiz’s version is no more historically accurate than the oral poetry. In his dramatization, Mihiz offered an interpretation of Marko’s life that could explain the Serbian paradox of a heroic servant to the Turk, all the while commenting obliquely on the nature of power—a theme of some topical concern in

Yugoslavia at the moment of the play's staging. That political subtext probably explains the fact that the play came and went without much notice, critical or otherwise.

*Kraljević Marko* takes place on the eve of the Battle of Rovine in 1394. Unlike *Banović Strahinja*, the play is not a retelling of one or more of the poems of the oral tradition, although it does include material drawn from "Marko Kraljević Recognizes His Father's Saber."<sup>62</sup> Marko is an Ottoman vassal who has just returned from reconnoitering the position of the Christian armies in preparation for the coming battle. When he unexpectedly comes into possession of a sword that had belonged to his father, Vukašin, he is jolted out of his twenty-three year slumber: it has been that many years since he last saw his father, who died on the battlefield of Maritsa in 1371. After that disastrous battle, as the only surviving Mrnjavčević, Marko sold his soul to the Ottoman Sultan, whose vassal he became. Upon receiving the heirloom, Marko is compelled to revisit the circumstances surrounding that ill-fated battle. His recollection explains the tragic turn of events: Marko's father Vukašin and uncle Uglješa had sought to supplant the Serbian king, Stefan Uroš, on the night before the Battle of Maritsa. Vukašin claimed to have received the spoken testament of Uroš's father, the powerful Stefan Dušan, who before his death sixteen years earlier allegedly told Vukašin to remain close to the weak Stefan Uroš, by implication to replace the king if necessary. Uglješa argued that Vukašin would destroy Serbia in useless warfare and that he, Uglješa, should replace the ineffectual Stefan Uroš. Unbeknownst to either of them, the archpriest Nedeljko has safely hidden away Stefan Dušan's *written* testament—which neither of them realize exists. As it turns out, the written testament has been with Vukašin's son Marko (a "trustworthy person") for sixteen years, since the death of Stefan Dušan.

Now, on the eve of the Battle of Maritsa, Marko is placed in the unenviable position of having to read this testament aloud before the assembled princes of Serbia. He was prepared for this fateful moment by his mother: "You are preparing for a long trip, son, and it has to do with something vital if archpriest Nedeljko calls you....but your mother has just one thing to tell you, Marko: do not lie...by the justice of God speak the truth. Better that you lose your head than your sinful soul."<sup>63</sup> Marko reads the testament, in which Stefan Dušan names his son Stefan Uroš as his successor and expressly demands that both

Vukašin and Uglješa be kept under watchful eye, never to be allowed close to power:

Were Vukašin to come close to the throne, he would have in his hands enormous power, but I am not certain that he would know to use that power with enough caution. He is too rude and intolerant, and is not loyal. On the other hand, Uglješa, without doubt the most capable man in our empire, is not only adorned by his exceptional capabilities but also by his exaggerated self-confidence.<sup>64</sup>

For demonstrating the moral courage necessary to denounce his father, Marko is rewarded with Vukašin's curse: "You will not have children, so that your child will not do to you what you have done to me and to this land today! And may your grave be unknown, so that your descendants cannot curse you above it for the collapse of the Serbian empire! And may your soul not be released until you have served the Turkish emperor!"<sup>65</sup> At the battle the following day, all of Marko's family except for himself and his very young brother Dimitar are slaughtered by the Turks. Marko is left with a fateful choice: to die with his brethren, or to offer his services to the Sultan and to live another day. As if to fulfill his father's prophecy, he chooses vassalage. And now, twenty-three years later, on the eve of another fateful battle, Marko is reminded of his father's curse. He decides to fulfill it to the letter, but only after making amends with his people by giving away the Ottoman battle plans to the Christians across the river. "Your curse has arrived, Vukašin, it has arrived. I have no offspring...there I will die such that no one will find a trace of my grave."<sup>66</sup> And so it goes.

*Kraljević Marko*, like *Banović Strahinja*, updates a Serbian historical epic, but beyond that, they share little. In *Banović Strahinja*, Mihiz humanized and modernized a medieval tragedy. In *Kraljević Marko*, he merely attempted to provide a logical explanation for the apparent paradox of the extremely flawed hero. But *Kraljević Marko* is less important as a story, more important as cloaked commentary on modern Yugoslav and politics and the abuses of power of the Tito regime. Stefan Dušan speaks the words of Lenin when uttering his testament: Vukašin and Uglješa are described in precisely the same terms that Lenin used when describing possible successors Stalin and Trotsky.

Marko himself suffers ostracism and exile for having uttered the truth in spite of great political and emotional pressure from his uncles. Mihiz's play comments on the dangers of telling the truth, of moral courage, in a society which rewards duplicity and sycophancy.

### MIHIZ IN THE SIXTIES

There are no simple conclusions here. Mihiz's actions and his literary output during the years surrounding the appearance of the Declaration and the Proposal are difficult to place because they diverged from a fairly common pattern of development among Serbian intellectuals, who often responded to real and imagined changes in the way Yugoslavia was ruled after 1966 (and the fall of Aleksandar Ranković) by reducing their own field of vision from universalist concerns to narrowly Serbian ones. Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović, two of Mihiz's closest friends, exemplified that process (reflected in Ćosić's withdrawal from communist politics and his later focus on Serbia's tragic history in his literary work, and in Popović's move from abstract painting to a realism that focused on the degraded fate of Serbs in Tito's Yugoslavia).<sup>67</sup> But Ćosić was a disappointed Titoist and Popović was a disappointed leftist, which meant that their loss of faith in Titoism and/or socialism left them cut off from their previous moorings in ways that Mihiz, who was never a socialist and who never had any faith in Tito, would never know. Mihiz, unlike his two friends, underwent no real transition. Although speculative, there are a few judgments that can be made at this point.

The first concerns the Proposal itself. Given the events of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, it may be difficult to imagine an era when Serbs truly were the most dedicated of Yugoslavia's nations to the success of the Tito regime's alleged attempts to create a single overarching Yugoslav identity for all of the state's peoples. Nevertheless, it was indeed Serbs who persevered the longest in the battle against the fragmentation of the state, a battle whose commencement they argue came with the demotion of Ranković in 1966. The Proposal, however, quickly altered the playing field by implicitly arguing that Serbs should give up on Tito's Yugoslav experiment and focus instead on defending the Serbian regions of the state, wherever they were. Thus, instead of arguing that the "brotherhood and unity" of the Yugoslavs



was worth preserving, the authors of the Proposal argued that, with brotherhood and unity already destroyed, the Serbs should save their own particular communities. In taking this position, the Proposal's authors foreshadowed the response of Serbs to Yugoslavia's demise twenty-four years later. In 1967, however, it was an unpopular position even among kindred spirits in Serbia, including Dobrica Ćosić, who rejected the Proposal as representing that which he most despised in Serbian national politics: provincialism.<sup>68</sup>

A second point to be made is that the Declaration/Proposal crisis revealed a curious element in the self-perception of Serbs, then as now: the inability of most Serbs to contemplate the possibility that they themselves act nationalistically. While the Proposal was deemed an outrageous example of Serbian nationalism by the regime in 1967, Mihiz and his colleagues who produced the Proposal believed that they were drawing attention to the nationalism of others. A look at Mihiz's plays can help clarify the situation. *Komandant Sajler* describes a highly idealized, extremely evil nationalist, who is, above all, German. We have already seen that Mihiz waved Wilhelm Sajler before his persecutors as a defense against accusations of nationalism leveled against him. Others are nationalists, but not Mihiz, not Serbs. The Serbian self image in Tito's Yugoslavia rested on the understanding that Serbs had been the primary victims of nationalist horrors in World War II, the most likely to join the communist movement, and the most revolutionary people among the Yugoslavs. In *Komandant Sajler*, Mihiz condemned nationalism at a time when Serbs like Mihiz were beginning to fear its reappearance in Yugoslavia, particularly among the Croats. The play was meant as a warning that other nationalisms were rearing their heads in Yugoslavia. For Mihiz, it was beyond belief that he could be accused of nationalism when all he had done was highlight the resurgence of Croatian nationalism, in the form of the Declaration.

Interestingly, Mihiz's two plays drawn from the Serbian folk tradition, though different, argue that he was not a nationalist. Instead, his primary concern was the lack of freedom in Yugoslavia. If nationalist themes were to be present anywhere, one would expect them in plays that resurrect the folk poetry that served as the foundation of Serbian national identity. But, in each case, Mihiz remains on universalist grounds. For instance, in *Banović Strahinja*, Mihiz did not romanticize his characters, nor did he propose that they provide models for

modern behavior. He modernized *Banović Strahinja* rather than allowing *Banović Strahinja* to turn modern Serbs into a didactically useful anachronism. This is a distinction that was lost on other intellectuals of the nationalist revival.<sup>69</sup> *Banović Strahinja* demonstrates that he was not one to weave folklore and history in his work; it is impossible to imagine Mihiz arguing that (to use an invented example) any of his contemporaries was a “modern Strahinić Ban.” He made Strahinić Ban modern, not the reverse. When Mihiz explicitly chose to update *Banović Strahinja*, he did so to modernize a piece of poetry that was beloved by Serbs, but he did not do so as a way of “nationalizing” moderns in the usual romantic way. He chose instead to impose a modern and universal understanding on that which was ancient. Although less satisfying as literature, *Kraljević Marko* is even more valid here. The play comments on the nature of power in an authoritarian state at a time when the fear of revived authoritarianism was becoming real for Serbs and other Yugoslavs. Authoritarianism has no necessary national face, and Mihiz has translated his own personal fear of persecution as a Serb into a story with universal applications. As direct evidence of his view of his own behavior in 1967, *Kraljević Marko* indicates that Mihiz saw the whole crisis as hinging on the nature of the authoritarian Tito regime, which allowed some speech (it was common among Serbs to believe that the Croats actually had regime support) but suppressed other.

As we have already seen, there were more than artificial parallels between Mihiz’s work as a playwright and his more public and political role in the “Proposal” crisis: *Komandant Sajler* comments on the evils of nationalism at a time when Serbs like Mihiz were beginning to fear the reappearance of nationalism in Yugoslavia; *Kraljević Marko* comments on the nature of power in an authoritarian state at a time when the fear of revived authoritarianism was becoming real for Serbs and other Yugoslavs. There are other interesting parallels to be drawn which reveal much about Mihiz’s consistent approach to things Serbian. In his plays drawn from the Serbian folk tradition, Mihiz betrayed qualities not to be found, for instance, in Ćosić’s fiction writing: Mihiz demystified and modernized, made otherwise heroic and unbelievable characters human and understandable. His willingness to poke fun at the sacrosanct (Jug Bogdan, most of the characters in *Kraljević Marko*) showed that Mihiz could never be too reverent about

the myths that underlay most Serbs' understanding of their place in the world. Ćosić, as we know, was determined in *Divisions* to reach some sort of understanding of the motivations of people who had become enshrouded in communist mythology, but he, as we have seen, failed: his "demystification" of characters like Mladen Rakić, the Doctor, and Vojvoda Planinski produced people who spoke more like the characters from the original *Banović Strahinja*: stilted, formal, and symbolic rather than real or ordinary. However, when it came to non-Serbian characters, such as Wili Sajler, Mihiz proved more than willing to engage in the stereotyping of evil. Sajler speaks and acts like a character in *Divisions*. Mihiz was unwilling to idealize his Serbian characters but felt no compunction against doing so with someone else's evil. As we shall see, as they continued their work, Mihiz and Ćosić would follow the divergent paths they laid down in the early and middle 1960s: Ćosić would more fully develop a picture of the Serbian people as divisive and divisible; Mihiz would resist the seduction of romanticizing Serbs, remaining for the most part on a more literal level. Just as Mihiz would be willing to mystify the character of Sajler, however, he would continue to be willing to place the bad behavior of other peoples on a more mystical plane.

## NOTES

- 1 Laza Ćurčić, "Mihiz," in Janković and Janković, eds., *Drugi o Mihizu*, 248–49.
- 2 Borislav Mihajlović, *Izdajice* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1986) 5–119.
- 3 Janković and Janković, eds. *Drugi o Mihizu*, 490.
- 4 Feliks Pašić, "Da ponovo ne budem imao šta da kažem," in Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1994) 60. This version is a reprint of an interview published in *Borba* (Belgrade) on June 30, 1963.
- 5 Jovan Ćirilov, "Mihizove čudne izdajice," in Mihiz, *Izdajice*, 387.
- 6 Ćirilov, "Mihizove čudne izdajice," 387.
- 7 Ćirilov, "Mihizove čudne izdajice," 388.
- 8 Pašić, "Da ponovo ne budem imao šta da kažem," 61.
- 9 The poem is translated in Milne Holton and Vasa D. Mihailovich, *Songs of the Serbian People: From the Collections of Vuk Karadžić* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997) 106–30; see also Svetozar Koljević, *The Epic in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 132–38.

- 10 Holton and Mihailovich, *Songs*, 128.
- 11 Holton and Mihailovich, *Songs*, 130.
- 12 Holton and Mihailovich, *Songs*, 112.
- 13 Holton and Mihailovich, *Songs*, 128.
- 14 Mihajlović, *Banović Strahinja*, 99.
- 15 Mihajlović, *Banović Strahinja*, 107.
- 16 Holton and Mihailovich, *Songs* 130.
- 17 Mihajlović, *Banović Strahinja*, 115.
- 18 Mihajlović, *Banović Strahinja*, 119.
- 19 Pašić, "Da ponovo ne budem imao šta da kažem," 61.
- 20 Pašić, "Da ponovo ne budem imao šta da kažem," 62.
- 21 Borislav Mihajlović, *Komandant Sajler*, in Mihajlović, *Izdajice*, 272.
- 22 Mihajlović, *Komandant Sajler*, 233.
- 23 Mihajlović, *Komandant Sajler*, 240.
- 24 Mihajlović, *Komandant Sajler*, 292.
- 25 "Postavlja se pitanje konkretne odgovornosti pisaca komunista koji su potpisali 'Predlog za razmišljanje'" in *Politika* (April 1, 1967) 6; Christopher Spalatin, "Serbo-Croatian or Serbian and Croatian? Considerations on the Croatian Declaration and Serbian Proposal of March 1967," in *Journal of Croatian Studies* v. 7-8 (1966-67) 10-11.
- 26 Along with Ćosić, Isaković had expressed reservations about the way the Ranković affair was handled. Isaković, however, sent no letters to Tito.
- 27 I am using the translation by Spalatin, "Serbo-Croatian or Serbian and Croatian?" 6-9.
- 28 The Novi Sad Agreement of 1954 is printed in Slavko Vukomanović, *Jezik, društvo, nacija* (Belgrade: Juslovenska revija, 1987) 161-63. For an excellent recent summary of linguistic politics in Yugoslavia, see Robert D. Greenberg, "The Politics of Dialects Among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in the Former Yugoslavia" in *East European Politics and Societies* v. 10, no. 3 (Fall 1996) 393-415.
- 29 Miloš Moskovljević, *Rečnik srpskohrvatskog književnog jezika s jezičkim savetnikom* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1966).
- 30 The framers of the Declaration tried to reconcile their claims with the Novi Sad Agreement, but could not effectively do so. That agreement expressly stated that Serbian and Croatian were the same language.
- 31 The numbers 42 and 45 were reported in "Rodu o jeziku," in *Književne novine* (298) April 1, 1967, 10-11; "about fifty" comes from Spalatin, "Serbo-Croatian or Serbian and Croatian?" 11. Dennison Rusinow says 45, in *The Yugoslav Experiment*, 225. The number 300 comes from "Javnost i javna reč," *NIN* (April 9, 1967) 8. See also Audrey Helfant Budding, "Serb Intellectuals and the National Question, 1961-1991." (PhD. Dissertation, Harvard University, Department of History, 1988) 139.
- 32 Branimir Šćepanović reported that "I signed, but not for cretins, rather for people who would understand that it is irony, that it is black humor";

- Milo Gligorijević, *Slučajna istorija* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1988) 71.
- 33 "Pismo Zorana Gavrilovića upućeno upravi udruženja književnika Srbije," *Politika* (March 27, 1967) 7.
  - 34 "Pisma Vase Popovića i Žike Lazića," *NIN* (April 2, 1967) 8. Vasa Popović and Žika Lazić claimed not to have known that they were on the formal list of signatories until the list was read at a City Committee meeting on March 24.
  - 35 "'Deklaracija' i 'predlog' su politički blizanci," in *Politika*, April 2, 1967. Aleksandar Petrović said that he was among thirteen communist signatories to the Proposal. Others have said that half of the signatories were party members. See Petrović's comments in "Osuda idejne osnove i sadržine 'Deklaracije' i 'Predlog'," in *Politika* (April 3, 1967) 5. Budding states that precisely half the signatories were party members; Budding, "Serb Intellectuals," 139.
  - 36 "'Deklaracija' i 'predlog' su politički blizanci," 9.
  - 37 "'Deklaracija' i 'predlog' su politički blizanci," 9.
  - 38 "'Deklaracija' i 'predlog' su politički blizanci," 9.
  - 39 Antonije Isaković, "Zašto sam potpisao 'Predlog za razmišljanje,'" in *Govori i razgovori* (Gornji milanovac: Dečje novine and Jedinstvo: Priština) 15. The italics are in the printed version, although it is difficult to imagine how they were conveyed before the City Committee.
  - 40 Isaković, "Zašto sam potpisao 'Predlog za razmišljanje,'" 16.
  - 41 Isaković, "Zašto sam potpisao 'Predlog za razmišljanje,'" 15–16.
  - 42 "Osuda idejne osnove i sadržine 'Deklaracije' i 'Predloga,'" 5.
  - 43 "Rodu o jeziku"; also in Gligorijević, *Slučajna istorija*, 78.
  - 44 Mihiz, *Autobiografija—o drugima*, v. 2, 39.
  - 45 Mihiz, *Autobiografija—o drugima*, v. 2, 40.
  - 46 Mihajlović, *Banović Strahinja*, 62.
  - 47 Isaković, "Zašto sam potpisao 'Predlog za razmišljanje,'" 18.
  - 48 Mihiz, *Autobiografija—o drugima*, v. 2, 287. Mihiz claims that his removal was covered by a change in policy on the jury: "in order to eliminate me, after eighteen years the permanent jury was suspended and an alternating one established." But the jury which met in 1967 was already altered from that "permanent" jury that Mihiz mentions (which had included Mihiz, Milan Bogdanović, Eli Finci, Velibor Gligorić, and Zoran Mišić). For the first several years of the award, the jury consisted of Stevan Majstorović, Milan Bogdanović, Zoran Mišić, Eli Finci, Velibor Gligorić, and Mihiz. Majstorović left after one year. After Mihiz left, the jury did change more often.
  - 49 Matija Bećković, interviewed by Moma Kapor, "Moj pretpostavljeni je Gete," in Miodrag Perišić, ed., *Moj pretpostavljeni je Gete: Razgovori od 1968–1990* (Belgrade: Knjižarnica Obradović, 1990) 22.

- 50 "You know, my father was a Četnik. However, as I have progressed, he too has made for himself an after-death career, in the Četniks. If I become a Nobel prize winner, he will become—Hitler!" Perišić, *Moj prestpostavljeni je Gete*, 26. In 1971, when Bećković was awarded the October Prize for his book of poetry, *Reče mi jedan čo'ek* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1970), the City Committee of Belgrade had the award rescinded because the author was the son of a Četnik; Latinka Perović, *Zatvaranje kruga: Ishod političkog rascepa u SKJ 1971/1972* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991) 307.
- 51 Perišić, *Moj prestpostavljeni je Gete*, 25–26.
- 52 Ante Kadić, *Moji izgoni iz Jugoslavije i povratak u Hrvatsku* (Split: Književni krug, 1992) 66.
- 53 Kadić, *Moji izgoni*, 162.
- 54 Dobrica Ćosić, "Vreme, književnost, jezik..." in Dobrica Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće: Članci i ogledi* (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1982) 40–41. Note that this article did not appear in the later edition of *Stvarno i moguće*, which is used elsewhere in this book.
- 55 Ćosić, "Vreme, književnost, jezik...", 42–43.
- 56 This untranslatable word refers to a Serbianism that focuses on the narrow, Šumadijan region of Serbia rather than the broader Serbian community. *Srbijanci* are Serbs from that region, whereas *Srbi* are from outside of it. Ćosić thus perceived what the thick-headed party bureaucracy could or would not: that the Proposal was the opposite of "unitarist," it was in fact quite narrowly defined.
- 57 Ćosić, "Vreme, književnost, jezik...", 43.
- 58 Greenberg, "The Politics of Dialects," 402.
- 59 Greenberg, "The Politics of Dialects," 404.
- 60 Pavle Ivić, *Srpski narod i njegov jezik* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1972).
- 61 Zvonko Simić, "Zatvoreni jezički krug," in *NIN* (1121) July 2, 1972, 33.
- 62 Holton and Mihailovich, *Songs*, 163–67.
- 63 Borislav Mihajlović, "Kraljević Marko," in *Izdajice*, 168.
- 64 Mihajlović, *Kraljević Marko*, 169.
- 65 Mihajlović, *Kraljević Marko*, 171.
- 66 Mihajlović, *Kraljević Marko*, 184.
- 67 Nicholas J. Miller, "The Nonconformists: Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović Envision Serbia," *Slavic Review* 58:3 (Fall 1999) 515–36.
- 68 Ćosić, "Vreme, književnost, jezik...", 40–41.
- 69 As was the case with a petition issued by a group of Serbian intellectuals in 1986 bemoaning the fate of the Serbs of Kosovo; one prominent victim of Albanian excesses was memorialized as the new mother of the Jugovićes, another as the new Deacon Avakum.

## CHAPTER 5

# The Suicide and Rebirth of the Painting: Mića Popović, 1959–1974

*...a painter from the family of rebels and spiters, a magician and a fire-swallower in the Serbian marketplace, writer and maker of B-movies, homeless person and bohemian, thinker and impassionate, brilliant technologist and skilled craftsman, a modern who dreams about muddied highways, student of the French and lover of the Spanish, one of those intellectuals with the heart of a poet which only our crazy and troubled time could create.*

Lazar Trifunović, 1963<sup>1</sup>

Mića Popović, the homeless bohemian magician described by his friend, art critic Lazar Trifunović, spent the 1960s in a swirl of creative activity and change. Even though his work was varied and often apparently chaotic, it was unified by its engagement. Popović remained devoted to the notion that his society should be one in which equality reigned, and whenever Yugoslavia's leaders seemed to betray that goal, he responded.

### ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DESTRUCTION: INFORMEL

In 1983, his 60<sup>th</sup> year, Popović lamented that he had wasted much time in France: "in old age, our fear of lost time begins to torture us, we realize that only a few years are left to us, a few months. In Paris, I fear, I lost precisely those years which would be precious to me now."<sup>2</sup> Most of the 1950s may have been wasted, but six months that he spent on the Ile de Brehat in 1956 were not among them.<sup>3</sup> There, he said, "I 'discovered' the richness of *non-formed* material and totally gave myself up to this new discovery, which would lead me to *informel* a year or so later."<sup>4</sup> His discovery had been made already by a generation of European and American abstract expressionists, but it fit

naturally into the progression of Yugoslav artistic development, which had stagnated. By the late 1950s, the dominant movements in painting had become—in the eyes of the more critical painters and critics—conformist, tolerating no contact between the painting and “social reality,” rendering them completely disengaged.<sup>5</sup> Popović’s adoption of *informel* “was a direct rebellion,” in his words, against this superficial “socialistic aestheticism,” as Serbian critics referred to the phenomenon of artistic and literary disengagement.<sup>6</sup>

*L’art informel* was a varied movement that included painters as diverse as Jackson Pollock, Antoni Tapies, and Wols, depending on one’s definition. According to Lazar Trifunović, its most influential Yugoslav critic/sponsor, *informel* negated “everything that destroyed the painting as such, above all, pure color; it had to revive an inventiveness that had grown tired; and it had to free art of the terror of geometry.”<sup>7</sup> Thus Trifunović referred to *informel* as “the suicide of the painting.”<sup>8</sup> According to Trifunović, “Belgrade *informel* appeared at the end of the fifties as a natural and *spontaneous* reaction to the first signs of alienation in our society.”<sup>9</sup> Popović himself later characterized the time:

As a participant in the adventure of *informel*, I remember that there was some nausea, something unpleasant and unhealthy in the spiritual climate, some irresistible need to send it all to hell, to burn the bridges which linked us with tradition, to stick out our tongue at the stale story about the bright future. To a number of painters out in the world and at home it was as if the end of the fifties truly foretold the flames of the future 1968!<sup>10</sup>

Everything from painting tradition to the stale rhetoric of Yugoslav socialism to a worldwide climate of disgust combined to produce in Popović and other *informel* painters a desire to destroy. And beyond all that, Popović noted, “*informel* appeared in the epoch of the cold war, in a period of very serious threats to the future of humanity, and artists naturally reacted very strongly to those general problems.”<sup>11</sup>

Popović was not the first Serbian painter to move to *informel*; Branko Protić preceded him, and others would join them. And, *informel* was a broad category that included many different approaches which designated differences in the level of physical involvement of the paint-



er, use of color, mode of application, etc. Popović was first exposed to it in 1956, when he saw some examples in a gallery in Paris, and his first impression was that “*informel*...demands a definitive, rough, and literal elimination of form, drawing, and color from painting, to the benefit of *pure material*.”<sup>12</sup> Two years later, after viewing the work of the Spanish painter Antoni Tàpies and his exhibit at the 1958 Venice Biennial, he was more enthusiastic: “The painting is coarse—at once powerful and noble. The insistence on material is not superficial and not a question of fashion. The paintings have the character of mineral deposits and leave open the doors for association (philosophical, ethnological), for human self-recognition, for national self-recognition.”<sup>13</sup> Popović later asserted that *informel* was a logical step for him, as he had, as early as “Of Fog, of Bones...” realized that “neither color nor drawing were as important to me as material. I think that I admitted to myself at that time that I needed to concentrate my work on the material plane...which led me to *informel*.”<sup>14</sup> Popović’s *informel* period implied a move “from poetics to technology,” as he “did not keep a single element of his previous painting, not the means, not the application, he changed it all.”<sup>15</sup>

Bora Ćosić once wrote that Popović decided “to destroy” when he adopted *informel*, and that in so doing he “touched the highest stage of freedom of which any painter could ever dream...”<sup>16</sup> The implication is that *informel* allowed Popović to destroy in his quest for isolation and absolute freedom, for his own liberation as a painter. Destruction and isolation would seem antithetical to the project of engagement, but Popović and others agree that his work as an abstract expressionist was in fact engaged. “Generally, I think that *informel* was a sign of sharp social engagement and not, as many think, the fruit of purely artistic evolution and problematics...the causes of the appearance of *informel* were found primarily in the social philosophical sphere.”<sup>17</sup> Were engagement limited to the variant adopted by communist intellectuals like Ristić, Krleža, and Ćosić, by which a constructive, optimistic, didactic, even utopian imperative was understood, *informel* would hardly qualify as engaged. But, Popović saw himself as engaged, just in a less programmatic endeavor:

When we speak of engagement, then we should not think of narrow political-social engagement, rather...of a means of defining

relations with the community, of presence in social processes, of witnessing of them, most often indirectly. Engagement in art is not a social/political...but a constant impulse towards the truth, a type of amplified courage to face facts.<sup>18</sup>

By responding to the anesthetized cultural climate of the late 1950s, by responding to the choices available to human beings in the late 1950s—communism? capitalism? east? west?—Popović saw himself as leveling the landscape, returning to square one in an effort to allow people to begin anew.

Trifunović divided Popović's *informel* work into two phases: "black" (1959–63) and "colored" (1964–69), referring obviously to the color schemes that dominated each period. Popović held two major independent exhibitions of these paintings, the first in 1960 in Belgrade at the Museum of Applied Arts, the second in 1963, also in Belgrade. The phases were divided by a short-lived, government inspired attack on *informel*, sponsored by advocates of the realist school in literature and painting.<sup>19</sup> Although the attack was inspired by careerism, it did focus on one obvious characteristic of *informel* by which the regime could not have been pleased: its emphasis on destruction, its rejection of anything that prettified reality, its questioning of rationality, its implicit rejection of social reality. And, in spite of the fact that the attacks on *informel* came to an end quickly, the period that followed them saw Popović revive elements of the painting that his first phase of *informel* had rejected: the use of color, the use of objects, and a move towards figuration, however obscure the figures might be.

Popović was still a seeker, no matter how much *informel* seemed to fulfill his promise as a painter. In film, in particular, he found new ways to express himself. In fact, he was probably as much or even more curious and adventurous as a filmmaker than he was as a painter—in this, he resembled Mihiz in Zadar, as Popović described him: "more modern...amateurs, it seems, always dare to do more and go farther than professionals."<sup>20</sup> Where his *informel* paintings represented his destruction of existing models, his flight from social reality into an unconstructed interior, his films would confront the past and the present of Yugoslavia more directly. In this, they were a clear indication of the direction his painting would take after 1968, with *Scenes*. Popović produced five feature films: "The Man From the Oak Forest" (1963),

“The Swarm” (1966), “The Stone Despot” (1967), “Thugs” (1969), and “Burduš” (1970). Together they constituted a significant contribution to the Yugoslav “New Film” and “Black Film” movements of the 1960s, which was dominated by the better-known and often (but not always!) more accessible work of Živojin Pavlović and Dušan Makavejev. Popović’s films are not thematically unified, however.

There is no simple summation of his work as a filmmaker, but we can say that his films mirrored—either led or followed—his work as a painter. Thus “The Man From the Oak Forest” could be called his “*informel* film.” “The Man From the Oak Forest” is a brooding study of a fictional “poet of death” named Maksim, who engages in ritual acts of murder in Četnik-held Serbia during the Second World War. It is unquestionably the least accessible of Popović’s films; it has no clearly articulated or “relevant” message. Before the Second World War, Maksim was a servant, probably to the man who would become the local Četnik *vojvoda*. Once the war begins, he lives on the Četnik side of the divide, although there is nothing in the film to tell us that he has any particular loyalties. Maksim lopes through the forests in which he clearly feels most comfortable, lurking in the dark in the local graveyard, accosting travellers and locals. The outbreak of war has allowed this man to find satisfaction in the most elemental release of murder, by slitting his victims’ throats, which he ritually follows by urinating. When he believes that he has discovered the existence of a cache of gold ducats, his actions become more directed—to finding the gold, to (perhaps) finding sexual release with the woman who would lead him to the gold. In the end, he is destroyed by his obsession with the gold: the woman is a partisan who would have him killed, the gold doesn’t exist, Maksim is shot down in a driving rain storm—one force of nature destroying another—and he crawls back to his forest to die.

“The Man From the Oak Forest” could not escape official attention even before its release, when censors ordered Popović to rid the film of evidence that Maksim’s infatuation with the partisan woman might have been welcome. One historian has said that the regime couldn’t tolerate a Četnik treated sympathetically, but it also seems likely that the censors would not put up with an examination of the war period in which explanation is reduced to the irrational.<sup>21</sup> The regime, in other words, could not be expected to accept a film in which a servant gets his revenge on society by engaging in blood/urination rituals rather than

joining the partisans. The film's photography, murky, textured, with purposeful but mechanical action, lends it to comparisons with *informel*, as do the incessant blocked and isolated images of entangled tree branches and roots, their texture hiding/revealing the form of Maksim as he emerges. The destructive impulse and the reduction of all action to the most elemental, brutish level renders "The Man From the Oak Forest" the "suicide of the film" as surely as Popović's *informel* represented the "suicide of the painting." Stripped of understandable motivations and storylines about progress and perfection, both the film and the painting style were explicit rejections of Marxist rationality. They were also, however, unspecific in an era when roiling discontent with the nature of Yugoslav socialism had yet to coalesce around particular issues and complaints.

#### SCENES: SOCIAL DISORDER, PAINTING, AND FILM

Popović's "suicidal" phase did not outlast the 1960s—by 1968, he had once again undergone an almost complete transformation. That transformation, caused by social tumult in Yugoslavia, produced his "Scenes Painting" (Slikarstvo prizori) as well as his "Scenes films," "Thugs" and "Burduš." None of them can be understood outside of the political and social context. The mid-1960s were a time of great change in Yugoslavia, as the state's leaders struggled to create a workable economic reform while maintaining the state's ethnic and political balance. The fall of Aleksandar Ranković, the crisis of the dueling language proclamations of 1967, the Croatian Spring, and the lurking uncertainty regarding economic and constitutional change all bespoke a general lack of direction. But 1968, the year of assassinations (Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King), student rebellions in France and Poland, and the height of the US war in Vietnam, was also to bring critical events to Yugoslavia that would illustrate just how tenuous was Tito's hold on his country's stability. Dobrica Ćosić would leave the League of Communists in May/June; Yugoslav universities, most importantly Belgrade University, would be wracked by student demonstrations in June as well; and the first postwar Albanian rebellion would occur in Kosovo in November. Although they failed in all of their objectives, the student demonstrations have left a deep imprint on the psyche of subsequent generations of Serbs. Interestingly, non-

Yugoslav students of the university movements of 1968 rarely even include the Belgrade events in their analyses. However, to this day, a small but influential segment of the Serbian intellectual community remains convinced that the student demonstrations of 1968 were the last great chance for Yugoslav communism to fulfill its promise.

The student movement began innocuously on the night of June 2, 1968, around 10 pm, when a number of students living in dormitories in New Belgrade tried to crash a concert put on for the benefit of a local workers' brigade.<sup>22</sup> Members of the brigade fought with the party-crashers, and the police were called in. The police separated the two groups, but the disturbance had already brought more students into the streets, where they milled peacefully if edgily. At about 11 pm, though, riot police in helmets and carrying batons arrived and tried forcefully to drive off the students. Soon thereafter, some students commandeered a fire truck, from the top of which they took turns exhorting their fellow-rebels, who numbered perhaps four thousand by midnight, to peacefully march to the federal assembly in downtown Belgrade. Shouting "Jobs For All," "Workers-Students," and "Tito-Party," the students made their way to an underpass leading into the city, where they came upon a cordon of riot police, who allegedly stoned them. The students responded with stones of their own, and the police began to encircle them. When the students set the truck ablaze, shooting was heard from the railroad track that crossed the highway. The "underpass" became one of the lasting symbols of the first phase of the student rebellion, which was a movement of rage at police brutality.

The heart of the action on the second day, June 3, remained the underpass, where students continued to gather on the trip to Marx and Engels Square, in downtown Belgrade, to protest the violence of the night before. Here leaders of the party, including Veljko Vlahović, Miloš Minić, Stevan Doronjski, and the head of the Belgrade party, Branko Pešić, came to attempt to keep the students from continuing their trek to the city center. The students called on their constitutional right to demonstrate, and appealed to the revolutionary pasts of the party negotiators: "Comrade Veljko, do you remember Spain?" But while Vlahović sat down on the ground to talk with a group of the demonstrators, Pešić announced that they would get to Belgrade "over my dead body!" Meanwhile Minić, the ill-tempered prosecutor

at the trial of Draža Mihailović in 1946, demanded to know who had approved the "beating of children." The tableau revealed a party at the crossroads, with students calling its bluff. Demanding what the party-state promised, whether it was jobs or the right to demonstrate, the students reminded Vlahović of his own idealistic beginnings, while a bureaucrat like Branko Pešić wished only to keep that riffraff from the center of his city.

The nature of the student movement changed during the day on June 3. Two factors propelled the movement forward: the behavior of the police, which was more brutal than the occasion had demanded, and the writing of the press, which gave the impression that the students were nothing more than a self-interested rabble.<sup>23</sup> From a fairly unfocused series of protests and clashes with the police in the vicinity of the underpass, the students were able to pull together a more coherent and organized movement centered on the university buildings downtown. Students, under leaders drawn from the League of Students of Belgrade University, occupied the Law, Philosophy, and Philology Faculties, the Academy of Fine Arts, and other buildings, and created "Action Committees" which coordinated the protests. Here, in the occupied university buildings, a disorganized series of demonstrations was transformed into a sophisticated protest against changes in the nature of Yugoslav socialism under the pressure of the economic reforms that had begun in 1963. Nonetheless, the party and state apparatus, with the press as their weapon, portrayed the movement as nothing more than a crude demand for full employment. For instance, Draža Marković, the president of the Republican Committee of the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, condemned the students during the movement: "Right now, the slogan of full employment goes against progress in this country...Full social equality means withdrawing from the principle of distribution according to work, means in fact Mao Tse Tung's equality in paupery..."<sup>24</sup> But even though some segments of the party wanted to believe that this was just a series of incoherent demonstrations by students who feared not getting good jobs when they graduated, there was more to the student movement.

One of the first student "resolutions" appeared on June 3 in the student village in New Belgrade. Signed by the "Action Committee of the Demonstrators," it demanded (to summarize) that social inequal-

ity be eliminated in Yugoslavia, that employment opportunities be opened up for new, talented university graduates, that the League of Communists “democratize” its decision-making processes, and that universities be given more resources and be democratized as well.<sup>25</sup> The slogans that the students used included “We Fight for a Better Man, Not a Better Dinar,” “The Revolution is Not Yet Finished,” “Against Enrichment at the Expense of the Worker,” “We’ve Had Enough of the Red Bourgeoisie,” “Self-Management From Bottom to Top,” “Tell a Bureaucrat That He Is Incapable, and He Will Show You Just What He Is Capable Of.”<sup>26</sup> On balance, if slogans chanted and displayed reflect ideology, the students were at least as upset by corruption in the party as they were by their own lack of jobs.

The days of the occupation of the university buildings (the students renamed the university “The Red University of Karl Marx”) brought new dramatic images, including the actor Stevo Žigon reciting portions of “The Death of Danton.” An independent group of Serbian writers wrote the students on June 4: “With excitement and admiration we follow your struggle which has become a question of conscience for every honorable person in this country. We heartily greet your courage to emphasize not the narrow needs of the university, but to initiate and revisit essential questions of freedom, truth, and justice in a socialist society.” Many writers who were offered the chance to sign this letter refused, because it originated outside of the Serbian Writers’ Association, and others disagreed with the wording (Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz refused to sign until the words “our socialist society” were changed to “a socialist society”).<sup>27</sup> The signatories included Mića Popović, Mihiz, Vera Božičković-Popović, Žika Stojković, Danilo Stojković (an actor and brother of Žika), and another 37 cultural figures. The following day, the UKS approved its own letter offering full support to the students.<sup>28</sup>

On Belgrade television on June 9, Tito gave a speech which brought the student movement to an end, to the initial joy but eventual chagrin of many of its participants. Tito was masterful and apologetic. The Presidency and the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists had been meeting since March, he said, to deal with the problems facing the state. Just as they were about to make public their responses, the student demonstrations broke out. “That was our mistake.”<sup>29</sup> They had met that very day to

consider the student movement: "There is not a single person—and at the meeting there were 55 leading comrades—whose opinion differed on the question of the solution of student problems."<sup>30</sup> But that did not mean that Tito believed that the student movement had retained its purity: "In a word, there was infiltration of those elements which wanted to exploit this situation for their own ends." They included "various tendencies and various elements, from the most reactionary all the way to the most extreme, pseudo-radical elements among whom there is a reflection of Mao Tse Tung's theories."<sup>31</sup> In the most famous portion of his speech, however, Tito paid homage to those among the student demonstrators who had acted out of the most loyal and consistent motives:

Thus I must say here today that I am happy that we have such a working class. And I can also say that I am happy that we have such a youth, which has proved itself mature. The most recent development in the universities showed that 90 percent of the students among our socialistic youth cannot be poisoned, does not allow various djilasites, rankovićites, maotsetungites, and the like to use them as an opportunity to worry about the students while they actually try to achieve their goals. Our youth is good, but we need to pay more attention to it.<sup>32</sup>

Tito's speech was greeted by the students as an affirmation of their positions. A week later, the Central Committee of the LCY met to approve its "Guidelines," which amounted to a further acknowledgment of the failure of the League to adequately address issues of concern to the students.<sup>33</sup>

Tito's speech followed a week of wrangling within the party over how to end the student movement. His speech of June 9 is now considered to have been decisive, because it ended the occupation of university buildings before two dangerous, and seemingly inevitable, developments might occur: first, that workers might join the students, and second, that the League of Communists within the university would lose control of the movement. Had, for instance, the "Action Committees" that the students established alongside the official student organizations ever gained the upper hand, the government would have had a much more volatile situation to deal with. The reasons



why neither of these dangerous developments came to pass included the fact that the press was busily characterizing the students as under the influence of various “enemies” (djilasites, etc.) or as selfish materialists insistent upon getting well-paying jobs. Živojin Pavlović later described a conversation with a female acquaintance, in which the effect of the press campaign was clear: “How about the students?” he asked her. “They should be hanged along Terazije,” she answered, with “hatred from the bottom of her soul.”<sup>34</sup> Also, the student leaders remained calm and in control of their comrades during the occupation. Ultimately, though, the success of Tito’s speech was founded (for perhaps the last time) upon the love of the students for him: how else to explain their glee upon hearing what amounted to a speech full of banalities? He asked them to accept his apologies for not taking better care of them and they did so.

Mića Popović, the seeker of social equality, was as certain to be moved by the student movement as Ćosić had been certain to react to the end of his supranational dream. There were good reasons for the students’ discontent. They were influenced by critical thinkers within Yugoslavia (primarily those of the *Praxis* group), and they had examples to follow. Problems with the universities were well-publicized before the movement began, and they went beyond the question of employment and into the realm of ideology. For instance, enrollment at Belgrade University grew between 1960 and 1965, but the percentage of students with stipends fell from 25.5 to 14.2.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the percentage of working class and peasant children in the university fell from 15.1 to 12.4 between 1962 and 1967.<sup>36</sup> The satirical magazine *Jež* constantly harped on the problems of unemployment, the development of a “red bourgeoisie,” and the university. Indeed, it would have been a real dereliction of duty had the central committee and the presidency *not* been discussing these problems before the student movement began.

Furthermore, critical thought about the nature of self-management and Yugoslavia’s path to a socialist future had erupted in the mid-1960s in response to reform plans formulated on the party level. The *Praxis* group had made it their business to attack corruption in the real world of Yugoslav administration and the economy, including the emergence of a new class of privileged communists and the persistence of Stalinist forms of authoritarianism in Yugoslavia. March 1968

saw student demonstrations in Poland; the spring and summer of 1968 witnessed the Prague Spring; and finally, May 1968 saw the grandest student rebellion of that summer, in France, where millions of workers and students went on strike, entire factories and even one city were turned into workers' communes, small children struck their classes at school, the Left Bank burned, and revolution seemed a real possibility.

Regardless the predictability of the student rebellion, and even though Tito was conciliatory, the League of Communists would be less so in coming years. *Student*, the magazine of the League of Students which had placed itself in the service of the student movement, was purged of radical elements. The leaders of the movement, including the legendary Vladimir Mijanović (known as "Vlada Revolucija"), would be persecuted repeatedly over the next two decades. The alleged tutors of the revolutionaries, eight Serbian philosophers and sociologists who were regular contributors to *Praxis*, were finally fired from their positions at the University of Belgrade in 1975. They are still referred to as the "Belgrade Eight," although they are less united today than they were then.<sup>37</sup>

#### WITNESSING AS ENGAGEMENT: SCENES PAINTING

Nineteen-sixty-eight's most important result was to unmask the myth that social equality had been achieved in a self-managed Yugoslavia. With paint and canvas, Mića Popović expressed this unmasking. In 1971, he unveiled his Scenes Painting, a selection of figural paintings that was an apparently radical departure for a painter who had been a dedicated abstract expressionist for well over a decade. His first Scenes exhibition came in April and May 1971, in the salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade. He showed twenty-three compositions, of which several involved multiple paintings (totalling thirty five individual canvases). On first glance they were a heterogeneous group, with several still-lives, a few disconnected portraits, a modest series of portrayals of a Yugoslav guest worker, and a serial self-portrait of the painter engaged in calisthenics. For Popović, Scenes' key departure is that the paintings are figural; he had abandoned such painting after "The Village of Nepričava" in 1952. Popović said his move was motivated by his perception that abstract painting had exhausted its potential for innovation as art. Although abstract painters had nurtured the

illusion that their art acted as a form of resistance to power in authoritarian societies such as his own, Popović had concluded by 1968 that “power...understood that abstract painting posed no danger...”<sup>38</sup> Tapiés, Popović’s role model in *informel*, is an excellent example of that phenomenon. By the 1960’s, his work had come to enjoy a special status in Spain, and it surely did not act as a source of opposition to the Franco regime.<sup>39</sup>

Trifunović, the art critic who knew Popović’s work best, identified three separate subthemes within *Scenes*: cameral painting, social-critical painting, and metaphorical painting.<sup>40</sup> He attributed the move to *Scenes* to three sources of inspiration: certain physical qualities present in Popović’s *informel* paintings; Popović’s work in film; and the student movement, which proved to Popović that the Titoist system was bankrupt and that Yugoslavia needed the bracing pessimism of critically engaged painting.<sup>41</sup> The similarities between *informel* and *Scenes* are straightforward: both emphasized materials to the detriment of color, and both integrated everyday objects into the painting. In this sense, *Scenes* continued Popović’s journey of exploration of materials begun with “Of Fog, of Bones.”<sup>42</sup> The various groups of paintings from the 1971 exhibition also clearly betray Popović’s recent immersion in the techniques, frustrations, and revelations of film making. Popović credited a film photographer, Aleksandar Petković, rather than some other painter, as his major source of inspiration for *Scenes*. He also referred to his canvases as “scenes” rather than “paintings,” which is at least evidence of his own intent to follow on his film experiences.<sup>43</sup> Examples of obvious filmic influence include the multiple “breakfast” scenes, which show Popović’s fascination with light and perspective, and *Morning Calisthenics of Miodrag Popović* which illustrates Popović’s interest in capturing movement on the canvas. In addition to those, Popović designed *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends* to work as a hexagonal enclosure: the viewer would enter and listen to taped recordings of the voices of the five friends whom Popović portrayed (with himself as the sixth), reading from their own work.<sup>44</sup> This composition fused the painted image with the spoken word in ways reminiscent of filmmaking. The student movement’s influence was also obvious in *Scenes*: Popović was moved by the student rebels to adopt a more aggressive social posture, a posture which is evident through much of *Scenes*. Thus *Scenes* is not much remem-

bered for its material basis, its relationship to film, or its fusion of the painting and the spoken word. It is remembered for its social engagement.

Popović hesitates to come clean on this count in his catalog notes.<sup>45</sup> He reported that in the past he had “fled from my social ‘I’ like the devil flees a cross....I feared insulting something holy.” By embracing his “social ‘I,’” Popović implied that he was now brave enough for social engagement. But Popović immediately qualified his own statement by asserting that “Scenes painting is not, in any case, political painting.” What is it, then?

Its ambitions should be more to make one happy, or, at least, to be a corrective. And I wish only to witness. TO WITNESS! I love this word which Ionesco gave dramatic and SUFFICIENT meaning. I wish to participate and to witness. I do not want to take anything, not even a position. I don’t need to. I do not answer questions which I have not asked myself. To view and to witness. But also to paint.<sup>46</sup>

For Popović, this “witnessing” becomes something pure, universal, and dispassionate. Popović’s introduction, taken in this light, seems to miss, or possibly cloak, the point of his own paintings. Even if he insisted on his role as a mere witness, others rejected his argument. Lazar Trifunović wrote that

Popović says that he wishes to witness, but he is not a registrar who photographs all that passes before his camera; he *chooses*—the aspect of life, the social context, and the theme; his documentarity focuses inevitably on that before which he pauses; the choice was not made incidentally or only because of the visual interest of the motif, but on a foundation of human and political convictions.<sup>47</sup>

If we accept the characterization of Popović as a camera, we must also acknowledge that the camera is in fact incapable of dispassion, and with Trifunović, reject Popović’s claim to be nothing more than a witness.

His claim should not be dismissed without some reflection, however. It is likely that the genesis of his use of the term “witnessing”

was in the relationship of his *Scenes* to earlier socialist realist painting. Popović could not escape such comparisons, given his abrupt transition from abstract to figural painting and his own earlier ambivalent attitude towards socialist realism. Heinz Klunker, one student of Popović's painting, described *Scenes* as "the first true Socialist Realism—the first pictorial expression of the truth about the reality of socialism—and not only in Serbia."<sup>48</sup> Popović actually endorsed the comparison: "At that time I wrote and asked *is not the return to realism, even to socialist realism, the only possible solution?*" By socialist realism in new and changed circumstances, one might understand a wide range of *critical engagement*, something, indeed, fundamentally totally opposed to any sugar-coating of reality."<sup>49</sup> But socialist realism had never promised to tell the truth about socialism; it had emphasized the didactic, rather than purely representative, task of painting in a society undergoing socialist construction. It demanded that painting act as prophecy, describing not a society as it was, but a society as it would/should be. Therefore, Popović's *Scenes* were never a "true" *socialist realism*. Aside, then, from the accident of language, there is no authentic relationship between *Scenes* and socialist realism. Nonetheless, language does matter, and "socialist realism" was an evocative but by 1971 empty concept that Popović could invest with the meaning missing in the original phrase. Popović's witnessing, seen in this light, is a response to the ideologized witnessing of socialist realism, a code for a realism with the blinders off.

There were two lines of evolution in *Scenes* over time, from 1969 to the early 1980s, when Popović's production began to slow. The first is that in the earlier phase, through the mid/late 1970s, *Scenes*' commentary was generally universal, whereas later they began to address ever more narrowly Serbian concerns. In the earlier phase, Gvozden the guest worker stood as a universal symbol of alienation in the modern world. By the late 1970s, however, Gvozden became obviously Serbian, his settings meant to create a purely Serbian picture than one reflective of general concerns. The second line of development saw Popović introduce and then emphasize a critique of totalitarianism. Here the universalism of the earlier *Scenes* is sustained, but in a different direction than the social commentary implicit in the guest worker cycle. The socially engaged *Scenes* paintings were best exemplified in 1971 by the four depictions of Gvozden, a fictional Gastarbeiter, one

of the hundreds of thousands Yugoslavs who left their country to seek employment in Germany and other parts of Europe. *Gvozden Spends the Night on the Way to Germany*, *Gvozden Relieves Himself Before His Trip Begins*, *Gvozden Blows His Nose on the Platform of the Niš Train Station*, and *Gvozden Goes on a Temporary Stay*: the paintings portray workers who must leave Yugoslavia to earn a living, and the titles reinforce that sense as starkly and evocatively as the paintings themselves. Gvozden reflected one Yugoslav reality, but Popović viewed him as one example of a universal phenomenon:

I think that in general the man who is extracted from his home, extracted from his nest and placed elsewhere, is part of the modern drama. I sense that it is a problem around the world. I don't like the word alienation, but the man who is outside his own skin is a tragic personality, characteristic of our times...I am certain that although France has no guest workers, I could find some other question to ask to undertake some other witnessing.<sup>50</sup>

It should be obvious from this that Popović was not fixated on the guest worker as Serb at this time; he was, instead, a reflection of the broader tragedy of modernization and population shifts that characterized all societies.

The guest-worker became an institution in Yugoslavia by the late 1960s; there would be so many of them that Yugoslavs would refer to them as a "seventh republic."<sup>51</sup> The phenomenon began in the early 1960s, accompanying the economic reforms and political liberalization of that era. Whereas before that point, working outside of Yugoslavia had been considered officially "in contradiction to social-political norms,"<sup>52</sup> afterwards it came "to be identified...as one of the key defining features, along with market socialism and self-management, of what was distinct and positive in the Yugoslav socialist variant..."<sup>53</sup> For those more critical of the phenomenon, open borders served less an ideological purpose and more to alleviate some of the economic pressure brought by market reforms, which resulted in immediate unemployment inside Yugoslavia. Of course, it was normal for the Yugoslav communists to frame an economic (or cultural, or political) necessity as an ideological innovation and justification for their own power.

Regardless the justification, the number of Yugoslav workers abroad soared between 1960 and 1979: 18,000 in the former, 680,000 in the latter year, with a peak of 860,000 in 1973. (These figures do not include family members who accompanied the workers, which one author estimates brings the total to 1,080,000 Yugoslavs abroad in 1979.<sup>54</sup>) In the early years (1960–1969), the guest-worker tended to be from Croatia: 56 percent of total workers abroad in 1960, down to 37.8 percent in 1969. The Serbian numbers rose significantly in the same period: from 10.6 percent in 1960 to 27.1 percent in 1969.<sup>55</sup> Considering nationality rather than republic of origin, the numbers show that in 1971 guest-workers of Croatian nationality were heavily over-represented (39 percent of workers, 22.2 percent of the population of Yugoslavia) and Serbs were quite under-represented (28.5 percent of workers, 39.9 percent of the population of Yugoslavia). Members of different Yugoslav nations would tend towards different destinations: the Croats and Bosnians to Germany, the Serbs to Germany but also in higher proportions to France and Austria, the Macedonians to Australia. The phenomenon, then, was neither uniquely Serbian in origin (quite the contrary), nor uniquely German in destination.

Popović's vision of the guest-worker was personal, of course; he chose to emphasize this particular picture of humiliation, and it was a picture that responded to the attitudes of many Yugoslavs, if not necessarily to the reality of the fate of the guest-worker. Popović borrowed the character of Gvozden from his film "Thugs," the name chosen for its "strength, firmness, and sturdiness" (the word actually means "iron"). Perhaps it is no accident that another Gvozden was Ćosić's tragic victim in *Far Away is the Sun*. For his model for Gvozden, Popović used Danilo Stojković, Žika Stojković's brother and the actor who had played Gvozden in the film. "Thugs" examines the lives of two brothers (Gvozden and Isidor) at the end of the Second World War. Partisans, they had been soldiers and executioners at the end of the war. When they are demobilized, they return to their home village to discover it destroyed, their house gutted. They inhabit it, however, and use its environs as a playground on which they continue to play war even as life is supposed to return to "normal." Discovering that they had both secretly brought their automatic weapons home as souvenirs, they eventually sink so deeply into their

more fulfilling lives in battle that they have a shootout and kill each other. Needless to say, the film's depiction of partisans as aimless and pointless killers at that glorious moment when the country was being remade did not resonate with the authorities, who persistently refused to allow the film to be seen until at least the mid-1980s.<sup>56</sup> The painted Gvozden is not so far removed from a film depiction. One of the first group of four "Gvozden" paintings in 1971 included *Gvozden Relieves Himself Before His Trip Begins*, which is taken almost literally from the film; the only difference is that in the film, the scene is a frontal view. At other points, Isidor urinating on a wall and the two of them carrying their boxed belongings on their shoulders would be recalled in later Gvozden-cycle Scenes paintings. Gvozden, Stojković, individual scenes, all illustrate the permeability of Popović's film and painting at this time.

Equally critical to understanding the intricate weave that Popović's films and painting created at the beginning of "Scenes" is the fact that his final film, "Burduš" (1970), actually offers an alternative fate for Isidor. "Burduš" examines the life of a singer/bassist in a bar band in contemporary Serbia.<sup>57</sup> Popović did not rate it highly himself.<sup>58</sup> Living a classic life of quiet desperation, Burduš is a man of limited intelligence and ambition. After being abandoned by his wife and swindled by his friend, he speaks about emigrating to a man at the Swedish embassy, who suggests that he go to Germany ("they're accepting new workers"). "Me, to Germany..." he says quietly, as if he can't imagine going *there*. Eventually he does decide he must leave, to give his ex-friend and ex-wife "a little space," but even after learning the German for his three most important words ("bread...love...and freedom"), he can't scrape the money together for the ticket. In the end, he is rescued from his trip by the reappearance of his friends and wife on the railway station platform. Burduš is a character living on the margins of Serbian society, and his story is told with a much lighter touch than that of Gvozden via Scenes. And (in spite of the fact that Burduš is almost certainly a gypsy in the film) Popović makes sure that the viewer understands that this Burduš is related to Gvozden, of both "Thugs" and of Scenes. Midway through the film, Popović intersperses footage taken straight from "Thugs," in which Gvozden and Isidor (played by the same actor who plays Burduš, Jovan Janičijević) execute a German officer. Isidor, dead at the end of "Thugs," returns



to the living in Scenes and in “Burduš,” as an alternative fate to that which he suffered in “Thugs.”

The Gvozden of Popović’s imagination grew up in a “house of stone where every miserable little meadow is seized by a harsh and stinting God.” He fought hard in the war because “the light of faith in justice could illuminate and fortify him...” After the war, forced to “seek bread outside of his country, to exist...among people whose language he does not know...,” Gvozden “feels that in some important way he was tricked and that there is no way to make up for it.”<sup>59</sup> The cycle (which continued to grow until the late 1970s) is certainly poignant. The paintings accentuate the workers’ loss of personality, but balance it with the singularity of Gvozden himself, who, in the person of Stojković, is anything but physically ordinary. The four Gvozden paintings from 1971 are a modest group that nonetheless established the parameters of the cycle immediately. There was little overt politics; the only one to take an obvious political swipe is *Gvozden Spends the Night on the Way to Germany*, with its reversed window painting celebrating the May 1<sup>st</sup> “workers’ day holiday.” Degradation is the dominant theme, with Gvozden blowing his nose over his shoulder in one, and defecating in another. All of the paintings are linked to the train station, the loneliest and most exposed of places. Popović meant to highlight the quiet tragedy of Gvozden, and the striking features of Popović’s model Stojković raise him from the grey assemblage of the workers who head into temporary exile. Gvozden thus carries us from the invisible to the personal—he is one of that faceless crowd, but he also becomes an extremely suggestive single example of the degradation of the life of the guest-worker. Stark now, the Gvozden paintings would become more creative and more free-ranging over time.

If the Gvozden paintings were the most poignant, it took little imagination to understand the thrust of Popović’s witnessing among the others. A series of still-lifes portray black bread and yoghurt cartoons of the sort that Belgraders regularly bought on the street in lieu of breakfast; he would offer no floral and fruit arrangements in Yugoslavia in 1971. “Continuing this negative tradition, Mića extended it to add new elements to that universal trash heap: conserves, old alarm clocks, broken pots, and finally bread and onions, the basic food of the worker, guest worker, tramp, and lumpenproletariat.”<sup>60</sup> Then there is a portrait of Vuk Karadžić in which Vuk’s most pro-

nounced physical attribute, his wooden leg, projects out of the painting as if to declare his imperfection, the unvarnished reality without the usual attendant romance. Another remarkable painting, or set of paintings, exhibited in 1971 was *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends*. This multimedia work included large portraits of Mihiz, Stojković, Ćosić, Antonije Isaković, Lazar Trifunović, and a self-portrait of Popović himself arranged to enclose an open space. Once one entered the room formed by the paintings, one could listen to the recorded voices of each figure represented, reading aloud from a piece that each chose. *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends* highlighted personalities who were already considered suspect by the regime, for varied reasons, most of which we already know.

Critics found the exhibition bracing and provocative. Slobodan Novaković, writing for the satirical Belgrade biweekly *Jež*, drew attention to the desultory tone of most of the paintings:

Popović's "scenes painting" has no illusions about itself, but it has no illusions about us, either. In place of illusions, Popović offers us black bread, a passport for Germany, yoghurt, a temporary residence permit abroad, pasteurized milk, the wooden leg of Vuk Karadžić..., lousy workers' lodgings with sweet May Day slogans...the new paintings of Mića Popović are indeed without illusions!<sup>61</sup>

Dušan Djokić, writing for the Belgrade art journal *Umetnost*, identified the same qualities in Scenes that Novaković spotted, albeit less snidely. "Perhaps as never before, in our short and disordered history of the conquest of modern painter's language, has painting so loudly and caustically spoken out."<sup>62</sup> "Moving from *informel* to Scenes," Popović had passed "from the transcendental vision of the abstract landscape, an *informel* of ulterior brutality and existential nothingness to a no less stunning, monumental presence of the figure, expressed with cynical and cold objectivity..."<sup>63</sup> "Mića Popović has with his 'witnessing,' which presupposes the harmonization of thought and action...articulated a personal interpretation of the hell of the individual...with bitterness and resignation..."<sup>64</sup> Novaković also professed to fear for Popović, noting that his paintings would not likely be met with a friendly reception by the government: "Mića Popović is the first to

recall the fact that social painting can exist in socialism too. But that is not to say that in socialism, Mića can exist,” he wrote, only sort of facetiously. “Mića Popović recognizes that till now he had fled from the social ‘I’—fled like a true *thug*.... But, all things considered, Mića Popović will, after this exhibition of ‘Scenes,’ again have to flee somewhere...”<sup>65</sup>

But not yet. In 1971, the entire exhibition was evaluated a success or failure on purely artistic grounds, even though it included potentially tendentious works. It is difficult to believe that in 1971, for instance, the choice of “friends” in Popović’s hexagonal painting did not annoy the authorities; but, undoubtedly because other events, primarily the Croatian mass movement, dominated the government’s attention, this exhibition passed under the radar. But, by the end of the year, the ferocity of the national movement in Croatia finally brought other alleged examples of nationalism like *Scenes* under the regime microscope. When *Politika*’s award committee agreed unanimously to give its year-end award to Popović for *Scenes*, the party ordered the newspaper not to do so, and the award was not given for that year.<sup>66</sup>

Popović exhibited *Scenes* two more times in Belgrade in the 1970s. His 1974 show would have included 130 new paintings, but it was shut down on the morning it was to open, thanks largely to one collage (entitled *Formal Painting*) which presented Tito and Jovanka Broz with Dutch royalty alongside Gvozden, some prostitutes, and other *Scenes* luminaries. The juxtaposition was too provocative for the authorities, who first asked that Popović remove the painting, and when he refused, determined that the show should be postponed (although it never was rescheduled).<sup>67</sup> It became a potent symbol of state oppression of the arts for Serbian intellectuals. As the dramatic Bora Ćosić put it,

The sixth of June, 1974, the exhibition of Mića Popović, announced and set up in the Cultural Center in Belgrade, did not open, that is it was closed before it received the public, by an internal administrative ban. If anything, this ban speaks of the influence which it appears one artist was still in a position to bring to his surroundings. Popović became one of the central phenomena of our art because he also counted as attractive, modern, exaggerated, dark, strong, clever, bad, dangerous, charming. A magician.<sup>68</sup>

The catalog of the 1974 exhibition created as much of a stir as the paintings themselves. In the catalog, which was published but then pulled from circulation, Dobrica Ćosić commented on the paintings. Ćosić's interpretation of Popović's work in *Scenes* is one that has lasted, to be reinforced by Popović himself, especially in his 1986 speech upon entry into the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. For Ćosić, Popović's art was "super-civil":

super-civil is supposed to mean the seeing and recognizing of reality above and outside of general consciousness and ruling conventions. The super-civil in art is the passion for those truths of reality and life which exceed general moral, political and cultural consciousness; those are truths which do not respond to general criteria and norms; these truths are not connected to pragmatic-utilitarian goals and interests; super-civil truths are truths which tend to the universal, which have universal human content. To have a super-civil position, that simply means to love people and life above the useful, moral, political, beautiful, national!...This super-civil position is convincingly present in Mića Popović's *Scenes* painting...<sup>69</sup>

As he would with his own writing, Ćosić staked a claim here for Popović's *Scenes* as a source of transcendent truths. These truths, not being "connected to pragmatic-utilitarian goals and interests," thus existed outside the framework of communism and specifically the communist regime in Yugoslavia.

Ćosić's catalog notes not only introduced Popović's paintings, they introduced Serbs to *Simina 9a*. Never before had the existence of such a commune been mentioned; the friendship of its members was no secret—Belgrade's intellectual community was quite small, and everyone knew each other. But in these notes, Ćosić created a myth that served the needs of many Serbs at that particular moment. In short, he offered up himself and his friends from *Simina 9a* as a collective reminder that there had once been pure, uncorrupted souls to be found in Serbia, people who valued real, substantive discussion of the fateful issues of the day, nonconformists who rejected sycophancy. The fact that many of them had suffered for their beliefs, their independence, in recent years served to demonstrate to readers that one

could hold onto one's soul; at high cost, perhaps, but never too high for the genuine freethinker. A quick perusal of the catalog reveals that Simina 9a nurtured the character of such freethinking victims of the Tito regime as Mihajlo Djurić, Pavle Ivić, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Mica Popović, Dejan Medaković, Bata Mihajlović, and others. These people had placed themselves front and center as truth-telling opponents of the regime in recent years. It is also important to note that Ćosić began in these notes to portray himself in a way that would become familiar to Serbs thereafter: as the misguided true-believer who now understood—from his experience on the inside—just how destructive Titoism really was.

Ćosić's prose not only reinforced the image of these men as truthful and brave, but it did so in a mournful language that would become common in the work of Serbian opponents of the Tito regime. He introduced in these pages the intellectuals' search for truth, which would become the guiding vision of the intellectual opposition movement in Serbia. He began his notes by quoting Camus: "The truth must be constructed like love, like reason. Nothing at all is given or promised, but everything is possible for him who agrees to try or to open himself to danger."<sup>70</sup> The description he gives of the inhabitants of Simina 9a is designed to demonstrate that all of them—no matter their ideological starting points—sought that truth. Ćosić describes Mihiz as he writes "In which Direction"; as Bata Mihailović defends Stalin; as Popović devotes himself to painting; as he tells Mihiz that Stalin understood poetry better than anyone else, because he had mastered the science of history; as Mihajlo Djurić spends five hours a day in the university library in search of knowledge; no matter their ideological commitments, these were people who argued with each other, defended their positions, and later achieved greatness thanks to their love of ideas and their love of freedom. Like Ćosić, Popović had been drawn to the revolution by its promise, but repulsed by its reality. Ćosić found the general source of Popović's inspiration in his "generation," and the specific inspiration in Popović's participation in the life of Simina 9a after the war.

The generation to which I belong with Mića Popović was fatefully defined by war...and for us, in our spiritual essence and our psychology, the end of the war was not the end of the war. For our

generation, that end represented the beginning of “the future”;... to us, freedom above all else meant a return to humanity; a renewed recognition, experiencing, and originating of decency.<sup>71</sup>

But they had all suffered for their free-thinking ways. “Individualism, imagined as the greatest expression of liberty, has turned into slavery...,” Ćosić quoted Popović writing in his diary in 1962.<sup>72</sup>

Our generation evinces an honorable restlessness regarding ourselves and the world, the technical and consumer civilization, world, and society in which we live, with its hierarchy of values and negation of lasting, higher values, the subordination of the spiritual values to money or power...have become for our generation a fateful question of anthropological meaning. Seeking its answers on the road to historical existence, our generation continues to utterly exhaust itself in ideological battle and demolition; above that battlefield the smoke of resignation hangs high.<sup>73</sup>

For Ćosić, Popović’s *Scenes* (and his own literature, of course) represented truth in the face of totalitarian lies. “For people need the truth especially when it is not valued...Mića Popović has answered with these *Scenes*. We have every reason to pause before them; to ascertain their truths, to seek ourselves in them.”<sup>74</sup> The fact that the government shut down the exhibition only confirmed Ćosić’s assertions, and was a constant source of pride for Popović thereafter. Regime-friendly critics assailed Ćosić’s catalog notes, focusing especially on the “smoke of resignation hanging high over the battleground,” which served for Ćosić as a literary complement to the offending paintings: all brought doubt on the achievements of the revolution, all proclaimed Titoist optimism a great hoax.<sup>75</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Like Dobrica Ćosić, Mića Popović began to doubt the ability of communism in Yugoslavia to answer his expectations, which, unlike Ćosić’s, were never abstract or transcendent. Ćosić expected socialism to bring about fundamental changes in the essence of humanity,

in the nature of mankind. However, like the utopian socialists of the early nineteenth century, Ćosić had difficulty describing the nature of the journey that his humanity would take from its sordid present to its ideal future. When he began to sense a lack of commitment among his fellow Yugoslav communists to that goal, he lashed out at them and reoriented his vision, which nevertheless remained abstract. Popović looked for change not on that grand scale but on the street. He believed that Yugoslav socialists should try to create a better world, a world of equality and plenty. Popović lived in a different socialist universe than Ćosić, and whereas Ćosić was initially upset with what socialism could not accomplish, Popović would be disappointed by what socialism actually wrought in Yugoslavia.

## NOTES

- 1 Lazar Trifunović, "Mića Popović," (exhibition at the Salon moderne galerije, October 17 – November 7, 1963) introduction to catalog.
- 2 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 75.
- 3 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 71–72.
- 4 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 72.
- 5 Lazar Trifunović, quoted in Merenik, *Ideološki modeli slike*, 102. See also Trifunović's discussion in *Slikarstvo*, 71–73.
- 6 Milica Maširević, "Svetlost učestvovanje," in *Intervju* (Belgrade) February 17, 1989, 40. The phrase "socialistic aestheticism" was Sveta Lukić's.
- 7 Merenik, *Ideološki modeli slike*, 102.
- 8 Lazar Trifunović, "Samoubistvo slike," in *Politika* (Belgrade) October 27, 1963, 3.
- 9 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 76.
- 10 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 78.
- 11 Čelebonović, "Razgovori." This interview is not paginated.
- 12 Mića Popović, *U ateljeu pred noć* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1962) 50.
- 13 Popović, *U ateljeu*, 171; Miodrag Protić, *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1970) v. 2, 436.
- 14 Čelebonović, "Razgovori."
- 15 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 78–79.
- 16 Bora Ćosić, "Teatar Miće Popovića," in *Sodoma i Gomora* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1984) 175.
- 17 Čelebonović, "Razgovori."
- 18 Čelebonović, "Razgovori."

- 19 For a fuller discussion of the uproar, see Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 84.
- 20 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 42.
- 21 Daniel J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 96.
- 22 This version of the first night of the movement is drawn from a letter to the student magazine *Student* of June 4, 1968, quoted in Živojin Pavlović, *Ispljuvak pun krvi* (Belgrade: Grafički atelje "Dereta," 1990) 19–184. Pavlović's diary of the student movement was originally published in 1984, only to be banned and destroyed by government censors.
- 23 A famous article in *Borba* referred to the students in its title as "Young Sheep, White and Black." The black sheep were, of course, the rebels of the university. "Mlado žito i kukolj," in *Borba* (Belgrade) June 10, 1968, 1.
- 24 "Kolaz mišljenja o studentskoj akciji," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) June 22, 1968, 11.
- 25 Mirko Arsić and Dragan R. Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt i društvo* 2nd ed. (Belgrade: Istrazivačko-izdavački centar SSO Srbije, 1985) 79–80.
- 26 Arsić and Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt i društvo*, 86.
- 27 Pavlović, *Ispljuvak pun krvi*, 58. The letter is printed in full with a list of signatories in "Studentima beogradskog univerziteta," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) June 8, 1968, 2.
- 28 "Podrška pisaca Srbije beogradskim studentima," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) June 8, 1968, 3.
- 29 Tito's speech is reproduced in full in Arsić and Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt i društvo*, 117–22.
- 30 Arsić and Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt i društvo*, 119.
- 31 Arsić and Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt i društvo*, 119.
- 32 Arsić and Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt i društvo*, 120.
- 33 For the most complete discussion in English of the student movement and especially its conclusion, see Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, 229–39.
- 34 Pavlović, *Ispljuvak pun krvi*, 53.
- 35 Petar Ignja, "Studentsko pitanje—materijalno," in *NIN* (Belgrade) February 11, 1968, 4.
- 36 Borisan Džuverović, "Studenti ne traže milostinju," in *NIN* (Belgrade) February 18, 1968, 4–5. In an article published on June 9, 1968, the numbers were even starker: from 1960 to 1967, the raw number of stipends fell from 14,000 to 3,000; from 1961 to 1967, the number of children of working class origins fell from 15.3 to less than 10 percent of the student population; see Sergije Lukač, "Koreni studentskih nemira," in *NIN* (Belgrade) June 9, 1968, 7.
- 37 Mihailo Marković, Svetozar Stojanović, Ljubomir Tadić, Zagorka Golubović, Božidar Jakšić, Nebojša Popov, Dragoljub Mićunović, and Trivo Indjić.
- 38 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 31.



- 39 "Yet his work was by its nature and concepts too ambiguous to give much uneasiness to the Franco government." Edward Lucie-Smith, *Movements in Art since 1945: Issues and Concepts* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 74.
- 40 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 105 ff.
- 41 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 91.
- 42 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 99.
- 43 Čelebonović, "Razgovori." Petković was Popović's photographer on "Thugs" and "Burduš."
- 44 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 95–96.
- 45 Mića Popović, "Povoda termina: Slikarstvo prizora," introduction to the catalog *Slikarstvo prizora* (Belgrade: Salon Muzeja savremene umetnosti, 1971).
- 46 Popović, "Povoda termina."
- 47 Trifunović, *Slikarstvo*, 103.
- 48 Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 154.
- 49 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 31–32.
- 50 Čelebonović, "Razgovori."
- 51 William Zimmerman, *Open Borders, Nonalignment, and the Political Evolution of Yugoslavia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 82–83.
- 52 Zimmerman, *Open Borders*, 75.
- 53 Zimmerman, *Open Borders*, 76.
- 54 Zimmerman, *Open Borders*, 82.
- 55 Zimmerman, *Open Borders*, 84.
- 56 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 84.
- 57 "Burduš" was then made into a long-running television series called "Musi-kanti" (The Musicians), which followed the fates of the group of musicians from the film.
- 58 Jevtić, *Sa Mićom Popovićem*, 80.
- 59 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 88–89.
- 60 Ćosić, "Teatar Miće Popovića," 178.
- 61 Slobodan Novaković, "Mića bez iluzija!" in *Jež* (Belgrade) May 14–20, 1971, 25.
- 62 Dušan Djokić, "Zapis o 'slikarstvu prizora' Miće Popovića," in *Umetnost* (Belgrade) no. 29–30, January–June 1972, 46.
- 63 Djokić, "Zapis," 45.
- 64 Djokić, "Zapis," 46.
- 65 Novaković, "Mića bez iluzija!" 25.
- 66 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 96.
- 67 Some of the history of the postponement and of his own involvement can be found in Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1969–1980)*, 159–66.
- 68 Ćosić, "Teatar Miće Popovića," 177–78.

69 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 61.

70 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 9.

71 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 19.

72 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 49.

73 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 16–17.

74 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 17.

75 P.R., “Dim Dobrice Ćosića” in *Komunist* (Belgrade) July 22, 1974, 4.

## CHAPTER 6

# Fragmented Serbia

When we read about Dobrica Ćosić today, we likely get a short bio that tells us that he was “seen as the spiritual father of the Serbian nation,”<sup>1</sup> and that he started down the path to nationalism when he “warned in 1968 of dangers connected with Albanian nationalism” at the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia.<sup>2</sup> But this reduction of Ćosić’s career turn, which did begin in or around 1968, implies that his Fourteenth Plenum speech was a beginning, when in fact it marked the end of one period of his intellectual and political life, a period in which he tried to engage constructively with the party and the state. Instead of being a herald of a nationalist turn, the speech was his final reckoning with changes that had begun earlier; his speech of May 1968 concluded a phase begun with Ćosić’s disappointment with his failure to alter the form of literary organization. This modification to the traditional view of Ćosić’s speech opens the door to a more appropriate reading of it: it was not an example of full-blown nationalist excess, it was an example of reasonable resistance to the structural changes that had begun in Yugoslavia in 1963.

### FRAGMENTATION AS INSPIRATION

Ćosić’s first direct examination of the fragmentation of Serbia had actually come in a 1967 lecture at the Kolarac People’s University<sup>3</sup> entitled “How We ‘Create Ourselves.’” Ćosić took as his theme Serbian culture and its lines of development before and under communism.<sup>4</sup> “We have not established our national and territorial identity,” Ćosić said. “We are a nation and a land without a civilizational face. We become civilized in waves, and frighteningly slowly.”<sup>5</sup> Ćosić’s talk

reflected his belief that Serbian culture and the Serbian nation were tragically fragmented, but that such fragmentation could still be eliminated under a socialist regime in which local identities lost their central place. "Perhaps the most unfortunate characteristic of Serbian national culture is its disunity in content, time, and space." That disunity, historically determined in Ćosić's view, was nobody's fault; however, someone could and should be blamed for the failure of Yugoslav communists to overcome it. In the most surprising and aggressive passage in the lecture, he asserted that for the maintenance of Serbian disunity, "an entire ideology has been created. Austro-Hungarian and Comintern conceptions of the Balkans and Yugoslavia contributed to this ideology." The ideology itself was Titoism. Ćosić appended a warning: "one day," the nature of the ideology would "be understood with all of its consequences."<sup>6</sup> This was a remarkable statement for a still-loyal communist to make in 1967.

Embellishing his argument that Serbia was riven by contradictory traditions and cultural impulses, Ćosić turned to the ideas of Vuk Karadžić and Dositej Obradović, two foci of Serbian cultural development in the nineteenth century. For Ćosić, Karadžić's positive contribution to Serbian culture emerged from his struggles with the Orthodox church and the Obrenović dynasty in nineteenth century Serbia. Vuk embraced the idea of "creation, not conquest...Vuk testifies that the truth is more than that which is useful, that daring is more powerful than skill and experience...that finally, liberty is the social meaning of culture."<sup>7</sup> Having identified the positive in Karadžić's contribution to Serbian culture, Ćosić turned to the deleterious. Karadžić, whose ideas, in Ćosić's opinion, had come to predominate in Serbia, formulated "a nationalistic mythology and ideology, the mythomania of the nation, that is, the peasantry as representative of the national spirit and culture..."<sup>8</sup> Ćosić resented this Serbian culture that idealized the peasant, especially the peasant from the Šumadija, the Serbian core south of the Danube. He blamed Karadžić for this narrow cultural emphasis. Ćosić saw Karadžić's Serbia as identified with a limited geographical area, which excluded Serbs living outside those boundaries from the mythical, heroic core. "Without the abandonment of the old national ideology...it will not be possible to strengthen the historical unity of Serbian culture...not possible to found a contemporary, unified, socialist cultural-national consciousness."<sup>9</sup> Karadžić's Serbia

“undervalues and disregards the cultural creations and efforts of the Serbian people wherever it has lived and where it lives now.”<sup>10</sup> Beyond that, however, the persistence of the “mythomania” of the Serbian peasant nation endangered Serbs’ successful search for liberty, which Ćosić thought central to Serbian culture.<sup>11</sup> “In the era of capital, the modern state, new institutions, and political battles...this ‘primary’ trait [the search for liberty] and desire were not enough.” In the modern world, peasant culture resulted in “the brutality and violence of power and money, party battles, primitive bureaucracy and the usurious accumulation of capital [which] would threaten, endanger, and pervert those characteristics.”<sup>12</sup> *Roots*, Ćosić’s novel describing the conflict of patriarchal peasant culture with modern politics and socio-economic transformation, had described that brutality and violence.

Ćosić argued that Serbs needed to liberate themselves from that narrow conception of Serbianness even though a broader one would bring them into contact with neighboring nations. He counterposed Karadžić to Dositej Obradović, another early nineteenth-century figure who favored a European, enlightened model for cultural development among the Serbs. “Dositej, educator and moralist, praised knowledge, was its spokesman and interpreter, totally turned towards the European example, and in that civilizational sense was more contemporary and modern than Vuk.”<sup>13</sup> Ćosić proposed that Vuk’s Serbia needed to be fused with Dositej’s: “Today, possibly more than ever, we have reason to creatively unify the two theses.” Persistent divisions between those two Serbias—“antitheses—the people, the bourgeoisie, peasant or urban, national or European”—divided Serbian culture and were unacceptable to Ćosić, for whom the integration of disparate cultures was the primary promise of communism in Yugoslavia. Serbs had nothing to lose from contact with others; nor, significantly, did other nations. In fact, Ćosić appeared to believe that the regeneration of a divided and corrupted Serbian culture could serve as a model for the larger project of the creation of a Yugoslav socialist culture.

Our [Serbian] culture need not in any way be exclusive, closed, nationalistic, *srbijanski*, ‘republican,’ or ‘statist’; it has every reason to freely intermix with the cultures of neighboring nations....We have never smothered a single culture, rather we have helped and still sincerely help cultures to appear and freely develop.<sup>14</sup>

Yugoslavism might still bring the erasure of borders of all types and the integration of Serbs and with other peoples of the state; the question was, how could that happen if the state itself imposed the fragmentation of Serbs' own culture?

"How to 'create ourselves'?" Ćosić asks in his concluding remarks:

As an answer to that question, and for its realization, the "entire intellectual strength of the nation" and all of its imagination is needed. The dimensions and character, the willingness and structure of all of the intellectual and moral strength of society will determine the fate of our country, on its long and precipitous path into the contemporary and more human world....Without culture, one cannot become a modern, socialistic, reasoned, civilized, production society, which is our historic goal. Only through general education, a developed culture, and science can Serbia finally cease being a land of peasants, bureaucrats, and politicians.<sup>15</sup>

The lecture "How We 'Create Ourselves'" must be placed in its proper context. Delivered to an audience of the interested at the university founded in 1932 as a forum for progressive intellectual dialogue, we cannot know how influential it was. Nonetheless, both its timing and its content merit our attention. Its timing, the autumn of 1967, places it after the fall of Ranković and the language debate but before Ćosić's exit from politics. Ćosić had begun to consider leaving the party; he had already begun to harbor deep suspicions of its policies with regard to Serbia. Considering that timing, the speech was remarkably bold in some ways. Although, as we have seen, Ćosić had already begun to bemoan the rise of republican bureaucracies, this was the first time that he had actually warned of the consequences of their entrenchment (his May 1968 speech to the Fourteenth Plenum would offer the same warning, considerably enhanced). His emphasis on the necessity of creating a socialist culture in Yugoslavia was nothing new, but the slight change in focus—as he now concentrated on first consolidating a Serbian culture—was novel. Another innovation in "How We 'Create Ourselves'" was its historical focus. This focus found form in two ways: first, in Ćosić's identification of historical paths of Serbian cultural development (which complemented his broader theme of finding a way to incorporate Serbian culture in a larger socialist culture),

and second, in his assertion that Austro-Hungarian and Comintern (and now Tito's) policy had been directed specifically against Serbs (a theme of which we hear for the first of many times in his work). Thus "How We 'Create Ourselves'" appears at a real crossroads for Ćosić, in that it combines his earlier focus on working towards a better future and his later obsession with understanding the tragedy of the Serbian past. He was on the brink of concluding that the past conditioned the present and future in ways that could not be overcome without a consolidation of, or even revival of, a true Serbian culture.

Ćosić put his 1967 words to work a year later, in May 1968, at the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia. The Fourteenth Plenum met explicitly to discuss "national equality in Serbia."<sup>16</sup> By most accounts, nothing out of the ordinary was expected. *Borba's* reporter thought it would be "just another routine meeting, like party plenums most often were."<sup>17</sup> But the same reporter noted that Ćosić's appearance drew some attention, since he had not attended any meetings since Brioni. If this reporter did not expect anything unusual, he later said that "there [was] no doubt that the party leadership was informed about [Ćosić's] intentions."<sup>18</sup> Ćosić's speech can be broken down by its coverage of four themes: the rapid "bureaucratization" and "etatization" of Yugoslavia under current reforms; Slovenian and Croatian prejudices against Serbia; Serbian behavior; and the autonomous regions of Serbia, Kosovo and Vojvodina. The final three of those themes, however, Ćosić considered to be functions of the first: "In our society, ever more powerful bureaucratic nationalisms are at work."<sup>19</sup> "Political self-confidence is today the greatest political risk. Nationalist etatism and bureaucratic particularism can bring into serious doubt our ambition to create a democratic socialism—a society of socialistic self-management, a goal deserving of the greatest efforts, a goal realizable only with the engagement of the entirety of our society's unified mental and working power."<sup>20</sup> Ćosić lectured his audience, which consisted not only of the members of the Central Committee of the Serbian LC, but also the visiting heads of the other republican central committees, that "...one cannot avoid the widespread conviction that the formula of self-managing rights and self-administration of nations...[and] territorial autonomism cloaks a conception of a primitive, disintegrating, particularizing, inevitably bureaucratic and impoverished society."<sup>21</sup>

The danger, Ćosić believed, was that the decentralization of power in Yugoslavia would result in localisms that would “accept old ideologies defeated by the revolution,” by which he clearly understood the Croatian nationalism embodied by the Ustaša, the Serbian nationalism of the Četnik movement, and the other nationalisms defeated during World War II by the partisans. No nation, in Ćosić’s view, was immune to this danger. While an “anti-Serbian mood...emerges in certain environments, especially in Croatia and Slovenia,” Serbs were plagued by “dissatisfaction with [their] development and position” such that “resignation, the feeling of injured national and historical honor, a sort of general anger, have taken over a broad stratum of the Serbian nation.” A dangerous dynamic had emerged: “anti-Serbianism gives birth to anti-Croatianism, anti-Slovenianism gives birth to anti-Serbianism, and thus do Yugoslav chauvinisms mutually provoke, support, and feed each other.”<sup>22</sup>

Ćosić turned then to the Serbian situation in particular, where he demanded that Serbs themselves “decisively oppose the diverse expressions of Serbian national supremacy, which are fairly common in nationally mixed regions and elsewhere, and which...can injure the national and human dignity of the members of other nations.” Having said that, however, Ćosić drew his listeners’ attention to a phenomenon that would come to consume him: *srbijanstvo*, a “primitive and anachronous political mentality; a view of Serbia from Užice to Zemun...the non-recognition of the ‘prečani,’ the failure to understand the Serbs who do not live in the republic of Serbia...the lack of respect for the variety within the Serbian nation...”<sup>23</sup> In the Serbian language, “*srbijanstvo*” designates a Serbian identity confined to the old pašalik of Belgrade and its environs, excluding those Serbs (“*prečani*”) who live “across the river,” usually meaning the Danube but more generally to any region north and west of Serbia’s Šumadijan core. In Serbian tradition, the *Srbijanac* (as opposed to the *Srb*, who was of the broader Serbian community) played a more heroic role in the liberation of the Serbs from the Ottomans. Ćosić feared that bureaucratic nationalisms in Croatia and Bosnia would build walls between Serbian communities and feed on that historical tendency among Serbs to view the “true Serb” as one from the nineteenth-century core of the Serbian state. Ćosić’s message regarding the Serbs was thus somewhat mixed: he recognized that Serbs, fearing their status under administrative reforms,



were capable of excess; but he also expressed his personal resentment that "Serbia" would be reduced in size in the popular consciousness. "For our generation, will the Sava and the Danube really become the border between Belgrade and Novi Sad, Mačva and Srem, Banat and Danubia?"<sup>24</sup> And these were borders put in place by the CPY.

Ćosić then addressed the autonomous regions of Serbia, Kosovo and Vojvodina. He warned that ethnic relations in Kosovo were worsening, as a feeling was widespread among Serbs of "...endangerment... pressure to emigrate, regarding the systematic removal of Serbs and Montenegrins from leading positions, regarding the desire of experts to leave Kosovo and Metohija, on inequality before the courts and disrespect for legality..." He blamed these phenomena on the Regional Committee of Kosovo and Metohija (a branch of the LCS) and the "results of its engagement in the realization of the directives and intentions of the Fourth [Brioni] Plenum."<sup>25</sup> In Kosovo, "nationality is the basis of self-management..." he asserted.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Kosovo had become an Albanian rather than Yugoslav or Serbian preserve. After Ranković's fall, Albanians were allowed to feel free to act more aggressively and nationalistically, and Serbs should not have to face that. The LCS underestimated the "irredentist and separatist mood and desires among certain classes of the Šiptar nationality."<sup>27</sup> Finally, Ćosić issued a warning:

The bureaucratic-statist understanding of equality of the Šiptars in Serbia and Yugoslavia, and the development of their sovereignty, cannot but result in irredentism, in the deepening of political differences among the nations of Kosovo and Metohija and Albania and Yugoslavia in a permanent and open conflict.<sup>28</sup>

The key to understanding Ćosić's position is the term "bureaucratic-statist": he believed that the devolution of power to republics and provinces opened the door to national revivals that would endanger ethnic relations throughout Yugoslavia, not just in Kosovo. Ćosić also attacked "autonomism" in Vojvodina, where new "bureaucratic-statist" elites were entrenching themselves.<sup>29</sup> The only solution, for Ćosić, was for Yugoslav communists to remain loyal to a universalist approach, one that would render nations less important than being a part of a socialist Yugoslav society.

Ćosić finished on a mixed note of optimism which presaged much of the rhetoric of the future in Serbian/Albanian relations. His first point was that a separate Kosovo was not necessary, since Serbs were suited to govern non-Serbs. "...that liberationist and revolutionary Serbian nation has the consciousness, power, and will to democratically understand the national feelings of the Šiptars of Kosovo and Metohija, and to support all of their desires, if they are democratic in content and form, if they do not endanger the peace of the Balkans and the independence of the Yugoslav federation..." His second point was that Serbs were forced by history to concern themselves with Kosovo: "Because Serbs and Montenegrins did not conquer Kosovo and Metohija, they did not take them from the Šiptars through war, therefore they are not occupiers and conquerors. Kosovo and Metohija are the old and central inheritance of the Serbian nation." And he finished with a quiet threat: Albanians in Kosovo had better recognize that Serbs live there, and that Serbs must protect their cultural inheritance.

...the Šiptars of Kosovo and Metohija should not forget that they have lived together for centuries with Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, that the great works of medieval Serbian culture and the national liberation myth were created there, that the Serbian people gave great sacrifices and enormous resources for the liberation and progress of Kosovo and Metohija, and that nearly three hundred thousand Serbs and Montenegrins live there.<sup>30</sup>

Ćosić's solution: "the creation of a society in which national equality is created via social relations, but without the state framework, state attributes, national ideology, and national or bureaucratic 'defenders' or 'representatives.'" National identity would become a "matter of the private sphere, an existential possibility for the enrichment of one's creative originality, one antithesis to the growing unification of life, society, civilization."<sup>31</sup> This prescription is similar to that which he offered for literary organization through the early 1960s.

The Central Committee of the LCS "distanced itself" from Ćosić the following day, at the conclusion of the plenum. For his part, Ćosić announced on that second day that "I cannot accept any political responsibility for the eventual negative results of this plenum,

and, believe me, I will not contribute in any way to any sort of negative consequences.”<sup>32</sup> Two months later, Ćosić followed through on his promise and resigned his party membership.<sup>33</sup> After the plenum, the satirical bi-weekly *Žež* published on its cover a cartoon portraying Ćosić sitting in isolation from his Central Committee colleagues in the meeting hall, with the word *divisions* emblazoned across the top.<sup>34</sup> Ćosić’s *Divisions* concerned a Serbian people divided ideologically and fratricidally; here, in May 1968, Ćosić himself was isolated either by the Central Committee or by his own will. Both the event itself and the cartoon portrayal allow for different interpretations: Ćosić might have been forced out (and thus betrayed), or he might well have committed a purposeful act of political suicide.

In fact, Ćosić’s defiance was purposeful, and represented his first act of contrition before a Serbian people whom he believed he had betrayed as a communist. At this point, Ćosić had already concluded that communism in Yugoslavia was a corrupt and failed endeavor. At the Fourteenth Plenum, he acted in accord with this conclusion, cleansing himself morally and absolving himself of responsibility for future communist transgressions against Serbs and Serbia. The cartoonist for *Žež* was quite perceptive: in his drawing, Ćosić was not only alone, he had his back turned to his colleagues. He was not forced out of the party, he rejected it. Ćosić has since acknowledged that his separation from the party was his own idea, a result of his disappointment with party policy.<sup>35</sup> He harbored no hope that he could affect party policy, so instead of remaining complicit in policies he could not support, he sacrificed himself in the name of Serbia.

The Fourteenth Plenum gave birth to the persistent myth of Ćosić as the active subversive. The fact that Ćosić’s speech to the Fourteenth Plenum (on May 29, 1968) immediately preceded the outbreak of the student movement at Belgrade University on June 2 led then to the assumption that the two events were connected. Draža Marković, then a leading Serbian communist, wrote in his diary on June 16, 1968 that “there is no evidence for it, but I am convinced that there are immediate links between Gedža’s presentation at the Plenum and this action.”<sup>36</sup> Many years later, Ćosić himself used virtually the same words in conversation with an interviewer: the student movement was “immediately linked to the Fourteenth Plenum of the CC LC Serbia...”<sup>37</sup> Marković’s (but not so much Ćosić’s) temptation

to credit Ćosić's speech with fomenting student rebellion is understandable, if ultimately not credible. In 1968, Ćosić was personally close to the members of the "group of professors" (the *Praxis* group) who actually did inspire the students' actions and actively participate in the student movement, even if we can now see that his ideas and theirs were growing apart. Furthermore, only four days passed between the Fourteenth Plenum and the beginning of the student demonstrations. However, there were so many more substantial and verifiable reasons for student discontent that to attribute them to one politician's recent speech is to fundamentally cheapen the goals and ideals of the students. Ćosić has, however, always insisted that he had no direct involvement in the demonstrations themselves. In fact, he has claimed that the students tried to recruit him (a logical move, given his recent history), but he refused to join them out of fear that he could harm their cause.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, though, the point is that even if Ćosić was not an activist in early June 1968, and even if it takes a suspension of judgment to attribute the student movement to his speech of May 29, it is clear that Ćosić was assuming a symbolic role as the leader of forces opposed to Titoism in Serbia.

The tendency—logical though it was—to conflate the actions and goals of Ćosić and the Praxis group cloaked the fact that there were now two separate tracks in Serbia's nascent opposition to Titoism. One could be described as "revolutionary purism"—the Praxis group's members sought a truer version of communism in Yugoslavia, more consistent with Marxist teachings, as opposed to Soviet/East European practice. The other might be labeled "restitutionalist," and brought together Serbs who had begun to openly fear the dispersion of their arguably threatened nation. For now, Ćosić actually served as a bridge between the two orientations, as he had always sought the continued refinement of communism in the Yugoslav context, even if after 1968 he paid ever more attention to the problem of the Serbian nation's spatial fragmentation.

By 1968, Dobrica Ćosić was set on a path that he would follow to the end of Tito's Yugoslavia. Still concerned with the development of culture in communism, Ćosić would add a sense of trepidation that the regime was fundamentally anti-Serbian to his growing belief that Tito was uninterested in seeing through the supranational vision of the new faith. Accordingly, his commentary eventually concentrated on defin-

ing *Serbia's* culture under communism, as opposed to Yugoslavia's. Ćosić's ideas evolved—as seductive as it may be to believe that some catastrophic event caused him fundamentally to alter his focus, that was not the case. Nor is it the case that Ćosić was a closeted nationalist throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. The new Ćosić gradually redirected his focus from Yugoslavia to Serbia, all the while searching for a truly socialist cultural transformation in Yugoslavia as a whole. The primary problem that Ćosić identified in that development was the growing spatial and cultural divide within Serbian society. He might have asked: How can a universalist culture develop when it is being fragmented from within?

#### POLITICAL CHANGE AFTER RANKOVIĆ'S FALL

Ćosić left the Serbian League of Communists in 1968 after two years of silent protest against the party's response to the Ranković affair culminating with his noisy exit following the Fourteenth Plenum. It is clear that Ćosić saw Aleksandar Ranković's fall as an injustice, a conclusion based equally on his personal feelings towards Ranković and his own political inclinations. The institutional implications of Ranković's dismissal became apparent immediately, as the Yugoslav League of Communists formed a commission to consider the reorganization of the league. Its proposals were submitted to the LCY Central Committee in October, 1966. Aside from relatively cosmetic changes to the titles of positions (the "general secretary" of the LCY was replaced by the "president" of the league) and the structure of the federal administration (the old nineteen-member Executive Committee was replaced by a Presidium of thirty-five members and a new Executive Bureau of eleven members), the commission also noted the need to "adapt the organizational structure and method of work of the League of Communists to the new relations and to the development of the federative organization" of Yugoslavia.<sup>39</sup> In other words, the structure of the party should be made to match the new intent to devolve power to the republics and provinces.

Ćosić could not abide the post-affair reckoning within the Serbian party, which was being compelled from above to become less centralized and more responsive to the desires of provincial political elites. This tendency towards the devolution of power was initiated immedi-

ately after the fall of Ranković. Following the federal lead, the Serbian League of Communists appointed its own commission to reorganize itself and the way it chose representatives to its bodies. Setting the tone for future behavior in the post-Ranković era, the commission was forced to combat previous centralization of decision-making by presenting multiple proposals which would be debated not only by the Serbian central committee, but the regional committees for Kosovo and Vojvodina as well as mid-level party organizations.<sup>40</sup> The result was a conflicted party whose leadership “retained only tenuous control” in the view of Serbs critical of the developments.<sup>41</sup> Dobrivoje Radosavljević became the president of the Central Committee (the leading position among Serbian communists). As a member of the commission that accused Ranković of “deformations,” Radosavljević was a logical choice, but he lasted only a little over a year. Petar Stambolić, a longtime member of the Serbian party leadership, took over from Radosavljević in February, 1968.

Stambolić's tenure was bisected by the student demonstrations of June, 1968. In the aftermath of the demonstrations, Tito is reported to have exclaimed that “all of them should go,” referring to the leaders of the Serbian party. Tito was convinced that the party had not paid enough attention to the Belgrade University professors (members of the Praxis group) who he believed had provoked the student movement.<sup>42</sup> Stambolić resigned his position at the head of the Central Committee and arranged for the appointment of Marko Nikezić in his place; Latinka Perović would replace Stevan Doronjski, the secretary of the Central Committee. With the ascent of Nikezić and Perović to the top of the Serbian party hierarchy, the era of the so-called “liberals” in Serbian politics commenced. Until 1968, Nikezić (b. 1921) had devoted most of his public life to diplomacy, having served as ambassador to Egypt, Czechoslovakia, and the United States and as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Yugoslavia. Perović, a much younger woman (b. 1934), had risen through the party ranks as a member of the presidency of the Yugoslav Youth organization and of the Ideological Commission of the LCY. Together, they attempted to fundamentally alter the way politics was done in Serbia and Yugoslavia.

The liberals have become the objects of a Serbian cult of “what might have been.” They are credited with having tried to modernize the Serbian party, with having been the best and the brightest of

their generation, and with having been the tragic victims of Tito's jealous desire to remain the single arbiter in Yugoslav political life. One Serbian commentator, writing in 1993, said that "their time in office meant a break in the continuity of a rule in Serbia based on a combination of nationalism and dogmatism. For the first time in its history, in a perfectly democratic manner, Serbia achieved a political independence that was not directed against any other Yugoslav nation, Yugoslavia itself, or the interests of its own people."<sup>43</sup> If that was all true, then the fall of the liberals was indeed a tragedy for Serbia. All students of the period agree that the liberals were characterized by their ability (rather than their obedience) and their desire to mold a set of policies for Serbia that would modernize its economy, democratize its political life, and satisfy the desires of Serbs and the nationalities of Serbia. Nikezić later identified five principles that guided them: a market economy, a modern Serbia, freeing Serbia from the "ballast of Serbian Yugoslavism," creating capable and expert cadres, and cooperation rather than confrontation with other republics.<sup>44</sup> Nikezić continued: "The idea was to establish bridges with all republics, always conversation and not confrontation, then modernization and intensive development of Serbia proper, close cooperation with Vojvodina and Montenegro, the democratization of political life."<sup>45</sup> One of the thinnest lines the liberals would have to walk would be between the LC and the non-party intellectuals regarding the nature of Serbia's organization after 1966; their attempt to encourage everything but physical unity among the various Serbian entities satisfied no one.

Unfortunately for Nikezić and his colleagues, their arrival came at an inopportune time—not only were the student demonstrations fresh in the minds of Serbs and of Tito, but the Croatian mass movement was gaining momentum, and an Albanian national rebellion would break out in Kosovo on the third day after Nikezić and Perović were installed. Aside from those tangible crises, it also appears in hindsight that Tito was in the process of concluding that the party needed to reassert control of political life in Yugoslavia, undoubtedly under the impress of those same events. And finally, while the liberals attempted to navigate those events and put their stamp on a new, economically sound communism in Serbia, a non-party Serbian opposition to Titoism would begin to be heard, with Dobrica Ćosić as its alleged leader (although this opposition would not be a coherent or consistent

one). All in all, it is difficult to say whether Serbia lost a “historic” opportunity when the liberals fell, because Nikezić and Perović had little chance to pursue coherent policies aggressively.

It is surprising how much the Serbian liberals have come to be seen as Serbia’s failed hope, given how little they accomplished. But, they have come to occupy that symbolic position in the memory of Serbs who see what came after 1974 as a horrible tragedy inflicted by the inept party hacks with whom Tito replaced them. They resigned their positions in November 1972, eleven months after the Croatian leadership of Savka Dabčević-Kučar, Mika Tripalo, and Pero Pirker, who fell from power in December 1971 when the Croatian Spring movement which they embraced got out of hand. The comparison with the Croatian situation disturbed Serbs: Croatian party leaders embraced a nationalist, in the end even separatist, movement; Serbian party leaders wished to modernize Serbia and Yugoslavia, were not nationalists *or* centralists, yet lost their positions as well. The liberals could not overcome the complexity of their position—unlike Dabčević-Kučar and Tripalo, who are still revered by Croats for their efforts, the liberals were loved neither by Tito nor Serbs in general. Mijalko Todorović, an original partisan who was an integral part of the liberal group in Serbia after the fall of Ranković in 1966, believed that the liberals “did not have enough support in Serbia itself, i.e., that they did not express the majority mood.”<sup>46</sup> Instead, they were caught between two rocks: Tito, and a Serbian intelligentsia which was growing more and more restive. The hectic nature of the liberal period in Serbian postwar politics was magnified by the fact that they and Tito were working at cross purposes. Whereas the liberals were concerned with modernizing and democratizing Serbia, Tito and Kardelj were most concerned with reasserting the power of the League of Communists.

The Liberals had to worry about both flanks: Tito and the Serbian intellectuals, flailing away at them from different corners. Ćosić now gave much of that brooding intellectual elite a focus for their anger at the regime. Ćosić, who had resigned from the UKS in 1965 and the SKJ in 1968, became president of the Serbian Literary Guild (SKZ) in 1969. His task, in the words of the historian of the SKZ, was to “return the guild to the nurturing of the soul of Serbian culture, to initiate new research and emphasize work in progression Serbian tra-



dition, to revitalize its illumination of the entirety of Serbian cultural space.”<sup>47</sup> In 1971, as president of the guild, Ćosić would lament the loss of Serbia’s connection with its past and ideals, which, he believed, had fallen by the wayside:

Some essential national and cultural goals of the Serbian nation, evidenced on battlefields and gallows, in prisons and camps, thus, everywhere at the highest cost—goals and ideals named by Vuk and Dositej, Njegoš and Branko Radičević, Sima Matavulj and Stojan Novaković, Djura Jakšić and Jovan Cvijić, Petar Kočić and Isidora Sekulić, Ivo Andrić and Veljko Petrović. To many of our contemporaries, a passel of national, social, and cultural ideals of several generations still seem unrealized.<sup>48</sup>

Ćosić sought to reconnect the SKZ to that ignored past. His move had important institutional connotations: he had now begun to refocus his efforts, switching from the Yugoslav context, where he had concluded that the dream of integration had failed, to the Serbian context, where the task was parallel, but narrowed. Now, under his leadership, the SKZ would contribute to the integration of the Serbian people, wherever it lived. Having said that, however, Ćosić would continually emphasize—as he had earlier, in both “How We ‘Create Ourselves’” and in his speech to the Fourteenth Plenum—that Serbs were fundamentally, even intrinsically, universalist in their perspectives. In other words, their culture embodied the very virtues that a socialist, Yugoslav, culture would eventually embrace. They were, it seems, universalists, by definition.

As president of the *zadruga*, Ćosić turned his attention for the first time in fifteen years to practical matters: specifically, reviving an institution that had been allowed to wither after the Second World War, bearing the burden of its collaboration during that war. In his first speech to the guild as president, he bemoaned the weakness of the organization’s network of cultural activists and its funding. To those ends, he suggested that the guild be infused with a new crusading spirit in the hope of raising funds to allow it to publish as it had through the outbreak of the Second World War. Guiding these activities would be a reverence for “those ideas which make up the national culture, in spirit and in meaning, universally human in time and space.”<sup>49</sup>

By May 1971, Ćosić had succeeded in building support for the SKZ, which now expanded to include an executive committee and a directorate. The executive committee of the *zadruga* included Mića Popović, Radovan Samardžić, Mihailo Djurić, Kosta Mihailović, Vojislav Djurić, Pavle Ivić, Dimitrije Bogdanović, Slobodan Selenić, Meša Selimović, Milorad Pavić, Dušan Matić, Ivo Andrić, Erih Koš, Svetlana Velmar-Janković, Skender Kulenović, Mihailo Marković, and many others. Ćosić, as president, Vojislav Djurić, as vice-president, and Selenić, as secretary, filled out the directorate. They represented a healthy cross-section of the Serbian intelligentsia, with perhaps more who could be described as critics of the regime than might have been expected.<sup>50</sup>

Aside from bringing in some of Serbia's most prominent writers and cultural figures, the only initiative that Ćosić was able to pursue was a series of speeches across provincial Serbia (Kragujevac, Leskovac, Bor, Zaječar, and other cities and towns).<sup>51</sup> At these events, several writers would read from their work to a local audience; the goal was to increase an appreciation for literature among the less cosmopolitan people of Serbia. The SKZ sponsored these talks only in the territory of Serbia proper. Ćosić clearly wished to expand them to other Serbian-populated regions of Yugoslavia, but was not given the time, nor perhaps the permission, to do so. He was irked by the fact that the SKZ, which in his view had worked before the war throughout the Serbian culture zones of Yugoslavia, had "in recent decades seen its activity narrowed and for the most part reduced to the republic of Serbia." He revived his rhetoric from 1967 and 1968. "The true extent of the spiritual unity of the Serbian people, the historical and textual unity of Serbian culture, the unity which has existed ever since there have been a Serbian people and national consciousness, are being called into question."<sup>52</sup> That unity, which Ćosić asserted rather than demonstrated, had "only been contested, between the Berlin Congress and our times, by Austria-Hungary and the Third Reich."<sup>53</sup> On paper, according to Ćosić, nothing had challenged Serbian cultural unity since 1945, either. But: "...reality and practice are notably different. It is obvious that since 1945 and the completion of the war, we Serbs have denied ourselves the right to emphasize and stress our national distinctiveness, convinced that in that way we contribute to socialist Yugoslavism more fully."<sup>54</sup> The result of that typical Serbian willingness to give up some-

thing essentially theirs for the greater good was that Serbia had been “reduced to the borders of today’s republic of Serbia,” and that anyone who questioned that situation was accused of “Great Serbianism.” The result: “Our culture remains without vision, is torn into anachronisms, gets mixed up in all kinds of errors, turns into the ditch of history.”<sup>55</sup> Ćosić’s solution was of course to rebuild the unity of Serbian culture, rediscover cultural vision, and focus Serbs on that which was most important to them—their own culture, which had been set aside in the interests of a higher goal, now corrupted: socialist Yugoslavism. “I suggest then to awaken in people again a new and great hope. That is, I believe, the most difficult assignment of contemporary culture.”<sup>56</sup>

Such a call—for a return to Serbian culture—could only set off alarms within the halls of power. The fact that he took over the SKZ and proclaimed such goals for it at an unstable point in Yugoslavia’s postwar history only increased the danger for Ćosić, but at that point it was not Serbian nationalism that threatened the existence of the state—it was Croatian. When Ćosić uttered these words before the annual congress of the SKZ in May 1971, the Croatian mass movement (*maspok*, or Croatian Spring) was in full force. Thus he made certain that no one doubted his, and by implication the SKZ’s, opposition to nationalism:

We reject nationalism in culture today, this culture of egoism and aggression, intolerance and collective stupidity, because ideas of hate towards other peoples, violence towards foreign values...the devaluing of the other, acceptance of local, regional, particular criteria and measures, is deeply foreign to that liberationist, humanistic, and tragic essence of the Serbian people and their culture.<sup>57</sup>

For Ćosić, the failure to integrate Yugoslavia’s disparate cultures amounted to a devaluing of the Serbian contribution to Yugoslavism, for, he argued, it was precisely in its openness towards others that Serbian culture excelled. Serbia is open, Serbia gives, Serbia does not take, Serbian culture is antithetical to nationalism: reiterated, reformulated, repeated ad nauseum: Ćosić’s vision would consume Serbian intellectual and cultural life thenceforward.

By late 1972, Ćosić had to resign as president of the *zadruga*. His own allegedly nationalist orientation, and easy comparisons of the

work of the SKZ (specifically the *besede*) with the work of the Matica Hrvatska, which had recently been closed down as a result of its role in the Croatian Spring, made his exit imperative to the government. Between 1968 and 1972, the turbulence of the reform era reached its peak. Aside from the Croatian Spring, in Serbia, constitutional amendments designed as a second phase in the restructuring of Yugoslav society met with a variety of responses, none placid. The Serbian League of Communists, reformed under new “liberal” leadership following the end of the Ranković era, struggled to mediate between the inevitability of federalization and its own understanding of Serbian interests. Outside of the party, the constitutional changes found many critics from various perspectives. Certainly, Dobrica Ćosić was among those critics, but nobody in power had a clear idea of the precise nature of his role. Within the League of Communists he had already come to be a symbol of Serbian nationalism and in some amorphous way the source of all evil in Serbia. But, realistically, the activities of the SKZ were relatively benign, and Ćosić’s influence was far less important than many—himself included—believed. The Ćosić era at the SKZ, which ended in October 1972, left few marks on Serbian culture, more on Serbian memory. Tito had made it clear that he would not tolerate Ćosić’s leadership of the organization.<sup>58</sup> Ćosić resigned on October 10, 1972 (the second day of Tito’s four-day meeting with the Serbian leadership, which was about to resign), “because of the situation in which the Serbian Literary Guild finds itself, through no fault of its own.” Twenty-six members of the executive committee, including Mića Popović, Kosta Mihailović, Pavle Ivić, Radovan Samardžić, Dimitrije Bogdanović, Slobodan Selenić, and Meša Selimović, followed suit.<sup>59</sup>

#### ANOTHER MARTYR

Ćosić, who bemoaned the spatial fragmentation of Serbia, gained a martyr in Mihailo Djurić. Djurić, a member of the Simina 9a commune, found himself at the center of two controversies in Serbia. The core issue in both controversies was the fragmentation of Serbia, politically and culturally. The first concerned proposed constitutional amendments. The second attended the erection of a new mausoleum for Njegoš. First, the political: on March 18, 19, and 22, 1971, the law

faculty of the University of Belgrade hosted discussions of proposed amendments to the 1963 constitution of Yugoslavia. Like the University of Belgrade, other universities in Yugoslavia sponsored such public forums; these events were endorsed by the League of Communists as part of the function of self-management in this communist society. The amendments were also to be discussed by party activists of other organizations. In fact, harsh criticism was leveled at the amendments by Serbia's most respected and loyal constitutional law expert, Jovan Djordjević, who criticized the amendments' creation of a weak federal center and their inclusion of a right to republican or provincial veto of legislation.<sup>60</sup> Coming from a respected member of the establishment, this critique was simply ignored. In the case of the University of Belgrade law faculty discussions, however, the criticism was more explosive. Djurić was one of several speakers who criticized the amendments mercilessly. Another, Andrija Gams, a professor of law, delivered a powerful speech that asserted that the amendments unfairly punished Serbia by creating virtually sovereign republics and autonomous provinces; he also explicitly bemoaned the fact that those Croats who most questioned the existence of a unified Yugoslavia were being rewarded with these amendments: "from that standpoint," Gams said, "it seems to me that the amendments represent a great defeat [at the hands of Croats]."<sup>61</sup> On a less emotional level, he criticized the fact that the constitutional amendments would break up the unified market in Yugoslavia: "To this point, practice has shown that a unified market is not possible when the legislative branch is broken down into six centers, and even down to the level of districts, or for that matter enterprises."<sup>62</sup> Kosta Čavoški, an assistant at the law faculty, criticized the virtual veto power that two amendments would give any republic or autonomous province, a power that he felt would paralyze any moves toward even gradual change in Yugoslavia. Noting that the same people who had brought Yugoslavia the centralist constitution of 1946 had now offered the federalist constitution of 1963 and its amendments, he asked in conclusion whether "the task of us lawyers will be to interpret and defend the Constitution or to lead the people to the consciousness of the right to rebellion?"<sup>63</sup>

The most famous, and now even legendary, presentation at the law faculty in March 1971 came from Djurić, who refused even to speak about the amendments themselves.

I will come out neither for nor against that which is written, as I believe that not many of you will be satisfied with fixing or adding individual formulations in the text which has been so graciously offered us for inspection. I will speak about the initial assumptions and eventual consequences of today's constitutional crisis, and thus on something much more important, more fundamental, more essential; on something which the legal text does not cover, which is silenced in it, which is hushed up, hidden, even mystified by it.<sup>64</sup>

That which was mystified: the fact that "Yugoslavia is virtually a geographical expression, given that on its soil, or more precisely, on its ruins...a few independent, autonomous, even mutually opposed nation-states have been established."<sup>65</sup> Djurić expressed disappointment that the national question had again come to dominate discourse in Yugoslavia. Like other Serbs, from the Proposal crisis through the failure of Ćosić's initiative in the SKZ, Djurić meant by "national question" the Croatian national movement, and he clearly felt aggrieved at having to broach the topic at this point in Yugoslavia's postwar development. "Neither the national question nor the question of the founding of the state," he said, "has any higher epochal importance. Those are not essential questions of our times, in spite of the fact that an ill-fated mood so tirelessly awakens them in the dead of night in our region."<sup>66</sup>

As upsetting to Djurić as the revival of the national question, though, was the fact that the state seemed to be rewarding the Croats for their nationalism, to the detriment of the Serbs of the entire country: "...if we still must think and speak on national and state matters, if we still must align ourselves nationally and as states and delimit borders, then we must be conscious of our historical responsibility before the nation to which we belong...", he complained, "then we must know that for the Serbian nation at this moment the question of its identity and integrity is of the greatest importance..." The Croats had made nationality an issue again—as they had in 1967 with the Declaration—and Serbs were forced to respond, again as they had in 1967. "It is much more important to warn [the Serbian people] that the Serbian nation already is in an unequal position regarding other nations in Yugoslavia, such that the proposed constitutional changes,

in the end, are directed against its deepest existential interests. The ultimate consequence of the changes would be its complete disintegration.”<sup>67</sup> Djurić’s prescription for the Serbian people in this crisis was that “today, more than anything, the Serbian nation must be sobered from the mistakes of the past. In order to survive today’s trials, to be able to sustain itself in the torrent into which it is pushed, the Serbian nation must turn to itself, it must begin to fight for its dangerously imperiled national identity and integrity. That is the fundamental precondition to its further historical self-affirmation.”<sup>68</sup> Djurić’s presentation left little to the imagination. Gams spoke after Djurić and endorsed his comments.<sup>69</sup> Both, and several others as well, would suffer for their remarks, but none like Djurić.

Some of the presentations at the Law Faculty that March were reprinted in the student magazine *Student*; all were published in the *Anali* of the Law Faculty. In both cases, the publications were banned by the public prosecutor, whose decision was upheld by the Supreme Court of Yugoslavia.<sup>70</sup> As evidence of the complicated position of the liberals, Nikezić is said to have intervened with the Yugoslav supreme court to limit Djurić’s punishment to a fine; none of the liberals were willing to argue against any punishment, allegedly because Tito was demanding scalps at a time when the party was being criticized from many different sides.<sup>71</sup> Over a year later, in July 1972, Djurić was imprisoned for his presentation at the Law Faculty and one other written piece, protesting the erection of a mausoleum for Njegoš that was designed by Ivan Meštrović (in that case, Djurić was one of dozens of Serbian cultural and intellectual figures who protested the destruction of the old mausoleum).<sup>72</sup> In his remarks to the court at his hearing in July, Djurić concluded with this:

This prosecution is not only my affair and does not concern only myself personally. The fact that it was initiated and is being held has much broader social significance. In that, the judgment which this court will offer will not affect only me. It will decide also the fate of one great principle which sees in bravery for the truth the greatest expression of human integrity and the strongest confirmation of social engagement, and will, with that in mind, immediately influence the world view of many of my students with whom I have in the course of so many years tried to awaken the love of the

truth as the greatest passion of the mind, or, which is one and the same, love towards justice as the most important determinant of character. I hope that this court will have enough strength to bring down a judgment such as is expected of it by all of those for whom the good of this country truly lies in their hearts.<sup>73</sup>

In spite of his feverish self-defense, never mind the warning to his judges that he might become a symbol of that which they feared most (the “truth”), Djurić received two years imprisonment for his spoken and written words. There had been literally thousands of unjust prosecutions and incarcerations in Yugoslavia’s modern history; this one stood out for several reasons. First, Djurić was an active socialist intellectual, popular with his students; second, his talk before the Law Faculty had been public, heard by an audience and later published by *Student*, which meant that it was perfectly visible and could be judged on its merits rather than in a court of law; third, he made his remarks in an academic context which had been sanctioned by the LCY; fourth, in his talk he expressed ideas that were nationalistic, regardless his own disavowals of nationalism, while a nationalist movement peaked in another Yugoslav republic (Croatia).

The government had not tried and convicted Mihailo Djurić solely on the basis of his talk before the Law Faculty. The indictment had also included a short written piece entitled “Kamen razdora” (Stone of Discord). Djurić had contributed this essay to a volume of works collected and published to protest the destruction of Njegoš’s mausoleum on the top of Mount Lovćen; a new mausoleum designed by Ivan Meštrović would replace it, by decision of the Montenegrin government. The “amendments affair” and the “mausoleum affair” concerned different spheres of public and private life in Yugoslavia, but they were analogous. The amendments affair highlighted the fragmentation of Serbia in politics, and illustrated just how little the state valued the opinions of experts; the mausoleum affair did the same, but concerned a cultural, not a political question. The decision to destroy the old mausoleum and replace it with Meštrović’s new one was made by the Montenegrin authorities in 1952; by 1969, the planning was nearly complete, and in 1971, the new mausoleum was built. It meant that the old chapel at the top of Lovćen—Njegoš’s chosen place of burial—had to be destroyed. The decision had provoked strong oppo-



sition among many Serbs (and also many Montenegrins, Croats, and other Yugoslavs), who grew upset on four points: first, that the original mausoleum, designed by Njegoš and on a site chosen by him, would be destroyed; second, that it would be replaced by one designed by Meštrović; third, that Meštrović's design itself was outdated and inappropriate to the site; and fourth, that such a profound decision could be taken by the Montenegrin authorities without regard to the opinion of other Yugoslavs, and especially of Serbs, and beyond that of Serbs well-versed in Serbian cultural history.

Many Serbs noted that Meštrović's plan fit neither the specific situation nor the era in which Yugoslavs lived. The Fall 1971 issue of *Umetnost*, the leading Serbian art journal, brought together a long list of Serbian cultural luminaries to condemn the destruction of the original mausoleum in favor of Meštrović's creation. Lazar Trifunović, the art critic who was close to Mića Popović, proclaimed Meštrović's mausoleum, which was first designed in 1924, "completely counter to the spirit and essence of our art today and which totally contradicts contemporary concepts of the work of art."<sup>74</sup> Trifunović was the first of many who would associate this mausoleum with Nazi art and architecture: "It is no coincidence that this type of art has been supported by countries (for instance, Nazi Germany) which, on one hand, desired to glorify their political dictatorship, and on the other hand were against all that was progressive, avant-garde, and free in European art."<sup>75</sup> The mausoleum "glorified ideas which are very, very foreign to this country and this society." Njegoš's grave "dare not be weighed down by a type of mausoleum architecture which has adorned and still adorns the graves of tyrants and dictators."<sup>76</sup> Others had more commonplace aesthetic objections: Oto Bihalji-Merin believed, as did many, that the mausoleum was "oversized, too heavy for that position on the narrow summit of the mountain."<sup>77</sup> Still others asserted that Meštrović himself was a politically compromised individual who, as a Croat, was an outsider to Serbian culture. Yet Meštrović suited a regime that had enshrined the notion of "brotherhood and unity"—an outgrowth of early nineteenth-century Yugoslavism, of which Meštrović had been a representative. Žika Stojković pronounced Meštrović a political chameleon who was a Yugoslav, Croat, or even a self-proclaimed Serb when it suited the political climate.<sup>78</sup> Pavle Ivić absurdly declared Meštrović "a man unsurpassed in his hatred for the Serbian people."<sup>79</sup>

Virtually all of the Serbian opposition to Meštrović's mausoleum based its resistance on the sanctity of Njegoš himself. There were variations within this theme, however. The Serbian Orthodox church opposed the building of the mausoleum. Vladika Danilo II, the Metropolitan of the Montenegrin branch of the Serbian Orthodox church, noted that "Njegoš was not a poet, ruler, and only then a bishop. He was first a bishop, ruler, and only then a poet. If he had not been a bishop, what then? An ordinary poet!" As such, the metropolitan asserted that "the district wishes to destroy a chapel which is already sanctified, meaning the possession of the church, and build a mausoleum on that place, which cannot be allowed. No one has the right to disturb Njegoš's remains."<sup>80</sup> Serbian cultural leaders would not have agreed with the metropolitan's premise—that Njegoš's importance depended solely on his status as a bishop—but they did see him as a sacred figure in Serbian literature. Ivić, like many of the opponents of the Mausoleum's construction, proclaimed Njegoš "the greatest Serb among Serbian poets."<sup>81</sup> For Stojković, placing Meštrović's work on the top of Lovćen was "an artistic lie, a historical forgery, a challenge to all of that which Njegoš meant as a descendant and ancestor of those spiritual, moral qualities of his nationality..."<sup>82</sup> Dobrica Ćosić might have been the most combative in this regard: "I don't know what Njegoš is, if he is not the greatest Serbian poet of the nineteenth century, nor do I know what Serbian culture is without Njegoš in it." Ćosić went further, however, accusing the Montenegrin authorities of coopting Njegoš for a "new" Montenegrin nation and culture: "The injustice which these ideologues do to him in their so-called revision of the cultural inheritance, and in alleged efforts to affirm a national culture, or a national specificity, these ideological compensations are the harshest betrayal of Njegoš, his universality, his greatness."<sup>83</sup> Mihiz entitled his lament "Obretenije glave Vladike Rada" (The Decapitation of Vladika Rade), after the poem "Obretenije glave Tsara Lazara," to compare the treatment of Njegoš (known as Vladika Rade) to that of the headless Lazar, carried from place to place until Serbia rose again.<sup>84</sup>

Mihailo Djurić's contribution to the collection focused most on the temerity of a bureaucracy in making such a decision despite the impassioned opposition of the vast majority of Serbian cultural figures.

In whose name do some provincial administrators assume for themselves the right to build a monument to a mover of the spirit who was in his own lifetime a citizen of the world, when they cannot even assure the common support, nevermind broadest support, of the domestic cultural public for their project?<sup>85</sup>

Others agreed, of course. Lazar Trifunović led the opposition to Meštrović's mausoleum, and constantly reiterated his disgust that the Montenegrin government ignored the advice of art historians. Mića Popović made the point as well:

So many intelligent and thoughtful contributions have appeared in opposition to the Assyrian monument at the top of spiritual Montenegro! So many good arguments of experts and historians! So many of the Bishop's own writings agree so perfectly with the arguments of the experts! So many people bemoaned the act, so many people went dumb before the vision of a beheaded Lovćen.<sup>86</sup>

For Ćosić, the fact that the government was creating a false cultural reality in the interests of a flawed brotherhood and unity promised a dangerous future: "That creates a hatred. A hatred which has a power—stronger than wisdom, courage, and honor of our generation. We can only be saved from that hatred by a new *Mountain Wreath*."<sup>87</sup> It is hard to imagine a less likely ode to tolerance than Njegoš's *The Mountain Wreath*, but Ćosić was undoubtedly overwrought.

Ultimately, the decision to place Meštrović's mausoleum at the top of Mount Lovćen revealed currents of opposition to the way that "brotherhood and unity" were administered in Yugoslavia. All of the opponents of the mausoleum, whether Serb, Croat, Montenegrin, or of some other nationality, resented the fact that the decision was made by a bureaucracy without the advice of art historians and other experts. Many Serbs were certain that the decision had been made in order to provide support for the notion of Montenegrin nationhood. The fact that the outcry echoed strongest among Serbs prompted the Croatian press to label this an episode of Great Serbian nationalism. The historical, artistic, and literary arguments for and against Meštrović's plan were entirely ignored by the Montenegrin government, rendering them

academic. As would continue to be the case, politics prevailed in this instance. But, for our purposes here, it is necessary to note that Djurić was one among dozens of Serbs and others who publicly protested the erection of Meštrović's mausoleum, and his contribution was far from the most aggressive. The prosecution of Mihailo Djurić appeared to be meant to balance the books, as the Croatian Spring had culminated with many Croats jailed for their ideas. The crackdown in Croatia had begun between the date of Djurić's talk and his prosecution a year later. Finally, the ideas that Djurić expressed were so close to those of Dobrica Ćosić in 1968 that it was impossible for Serbs not to link them. Ćosić had left the party of his own free will, but would come to be perceived as a victim; Djurić now became the first real victim of the League of Communists' fear of Serbian reconstitutionalism.

Djurić found defenders who were willing to go public. *Praxis*, edited by people who could not be expected to share his perspective, nonetheless defended it: "the fundamental assumption of any academic discussion is the freedom of expression of one's own opinion, without regard to whether it is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable."<sup>88</sup> The editors found the argument that Djurić was a nationalist absurd: "Obviously it cannot be shown that Mihajlo Djurić belonged to any sort of 'nationalist movement.'" While distancing themselves from his remarks, "with which we do not agree," the editors asked "is it necessary to judge and expel from the university a person who, in an academic discussion, utters even some sort of 'nationalistic declaration'?"<sup>89</sup> In the opinion of the editors, it was far more likely that Djurić was being persecuted because of his affiliation with *Praxis* itself, an affiliation that was long and deep. Several Belgrade university professors associated with *Praxis* had recently had their own passports confiscated; soon, eight of them would be fired from their jobs for their "moral-political unsuitability."

The Serbian Philosophical Society, via public forum and its journal *Filozofija*, also rose to Djurić's defense. Here Dobrica Ćosić stood out among the defenders. Ćosić adopted the same approach as the editors of *Praxis* had<sup>90</sup>:

None of us who have our opinions about the constitutional amendments, Meštrović's mausoleum, and on Djurić's thoughts on that mausoleum and those amendments, and are neither

Četniks nor emigrants, can, in the name of some valid social principle, agree that differences of opinion be established and judged by criminal laws and courts.<sup>91</sup>

Is this only the beginning of the trials and convictions of “engaged contemporaries” who have written articles and given speeches over the past decade?<sup>92</sup> In the same talk, Ćosić condemned the trial not only of Djurić, but those of Hungarian and Croatian intellectuals who were imprisoned for their ideas—not because he agreed with them, but because “the court is not the social force which can deeply and lastingly invalidate their backwards ideas, their misguided intellects...”<sup>93</sup> To conclude, Ćosić quoted the conclusion of the very Program of the LCY (which he had in fact written): “Nothing that is created dares be so holy for us that it can not be surmounted and give way to that which is still more progressive, more free, more human.”<sup>94</sup>

The uproar attending the destruction of Njegoš’s mausoleum introduced Yugoslavia to the issues that would come to dominate the eventual Serbian nationalist movement. In fact, the *Umetnost* issue that brought together the Serbian response serves as the best Serbian intellectual declaration of war on Titoism, even at this relatively early date. With the resulting hostility to bureaucracy, resentment of a regime that would ignore its cultural and intellectual leaders, fear of the political fragmentation of Serbia, and anger at the destruction of Serbia’s cultural inheritance, the imposition of a Croatian sculptor’s work in the interests of the invention of a specific Montenegrin culture provoked the crystallization of a nascent Serbian nationalist movement.

#### SILENCING THE INTELLECTUALS: THE LETTER AND THE CONSTITUTION

All the more ironic is the fact that the Serbian party leadership (Nikezić and Perović, et al.) that persecuted Djurić came as close as the intellectual opponents of Titoism would get to having friends in high places. Not only that, in November 1972, soon after the events described above, following a contentious four-day debate with Tito in October over the nature of the Serbian party’s relationship to other Yugoslav parties and Tito himself, Nikezić, Perović, and others withdrew from public life. The meeting followed the circulation of a now-famous let-

ter ("The Letter") in September. The Letter was composed and signed only by Tito and Stane Dolanc, the secretary of the Executive Bureau of the League of Communists. The essence of The Letter's message was that the LCY would reassert control of cadre policy throughout the country; would determine the party's line for the entire federation and all republican and regional parties; and would return to its status as a revolutionary party responsible for defending the achievements of Yugoslav socialism, especially self-management.<sup>95</sup>

The meaning of The Letter was clear to the liberals, who had been less than subservient to Tito's will during the preceding four years. Their independence had been manifested in different ways: Nikezić was openly critical of self-management, believing that market principles were a more rational basis for successful economic growth.<sup>96</sup> Perović, who had been most responsible for relations with the Serbian intelligentsia, had failed to come down as hard on that segment of Serbian society as Tito had wished. Mihailo Djurić and Njegoš were but the tip of the iceberg in that regard: plays including Dragoslav Mihailović's *When the Pumpkins Blossomed* (*Kad su cvetale tikve*), which was written by a survivor of Goli Otok, and Aleksandar Popović's *Second Door on the Left* (*Druga vrata levo*), which dealt with the student movement, called into question the party's legitimacy; the Serbian Literary Guild had been reinvigorated under Ćosić's guidance after 1969; contentious writers, including Matija Bećković, were awarded state-sponsored prizes for 1971; Mića Popović was originally given an award for his *Scenes* exhibition (it was withdrawn at the behest of the party, however, as was Bećković's). In most cases, Perović chose to attempt to ameliorate the differences between the party and the intellectuals rather than lose them permanently by persecuting them. She, and the liberals in general, were unable to walk that thin line; they were thanked neither by Tito nor by the intellectuals. Nikezić later said that although the liberals did not question or disrespect Tito as a leader, "I am certain that I called into question that ideological, religious foundation by which he was a leader. The problem was that he could not stand non-conformists....The whole time, we felt that the President, sooner or later, would conclude that he had had enough of us."<sup>97</sup> The League of Communists of Serbia thus lost arguably capable leadership; Serbia gained more martyrs, although of a radically different and less clear-cut sort than Ćosić and Djurić.

When, in 1974, a new constitution was unveiled for Yugoslavia, the political and administrative changes initiated in the early 1960s reached their logical conclusion. The constitution institutionalized all of the changes that had prompted the antagonism of people like Čosić and Djurić from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s: republics gained initiative, while the central government in Belgrade became virtually powerless; the autonomous provinces of Serbia achieved something akin to the status of republics, which, given the enhancement of republican status, was a double blow to those who feared the administrative parcelization of Serbia. Beyond those geopolitical structural changes, the widely-held Serbian position on the constitution of 1974 is that it made centralized decision-making virtually impossible, because in the federal parliament republican and provincial delegations voted as one, and any given delegation could veto legislation. Those republican and provincial delegations were elected by their own leagues of communists. Of particular concern to Serbs was the fact that the autonomous provinces were equal actors in this drama; beyond that, of course, the political will of the Serbs of Bosnia and Croatia was subsumed by the leaderships of those republics. Because those leaderships had been purged in 1971/72 by Tito, the republican delegations that were empowered by the 1974 constitution consisted of nonentities. A Serbian consensus of sorts is reflected in the words of law professor Vojin Dimitrijević:

...the 1974 SFRY Constitution was an ornamental piece of rhetoric and a justification for dictatorial (largely totalitarian) rule, and that its main deficiency, which became quite apparent in the late 1980s, was that it was not meant as a supreme legal and political text, nor was it intended to be seriously put into practice in the political sphere...<sup>98</sup>

Because that constitution put a premium on the republic/province as the source of authority in the federation, and because both the Serbian and Croatian LC's had been thoroughly purged of experienced, somewhat independent, competent people before the constitution was proclaimed, the space available to intellectuals to influence affairs in Yugoslavia had become as small as it had ever been.

Tito's "cultural revolution" purged the League of Communists of all liberal and pragmatic reformers and gave prominence in all professions to opportunists and poorly educated followers of the official line. At that time, no important influence on state matters was possible from without the party; nonparty philosophers, political scientists, jurists, and economists were, after 1971, reduced to virtual nonpersons...<sup>99</sup>

When Serbian intellectuals began to challenge the authority of the party in the aftermath of Tito's death, they would attack Titoism on the grounds that it had failed to incorporate all of Serbian (and Yugoslav) society's intellectual resources in solving the country's problems.

#### INSIDER OUT

By this time, Ćosić had begun to reconceptualize his role—and the role of intellectuals in general—in a socialist society. Whereas he had earlier been an advocate of engagement as a constructive, and even required, role for himself and for the intellectual generally within socialism, now he began to shape a vision of himself and of the intellectual as a moral force existing outside the realm of power. It is impossible to avoid concluding that he generalized from his own experience in both instances: until 1966, he had seen Yugoslav socialism as a positive moral force and thus seen his own creative accomplishments as a contribution to the creation of that socialism's goals; thereafter, having seen power and the governing ideology shift away from his own system of beliefs, he defined himself as an outsider, and framed a justification for that role that would encompass any Yugoslav intellectual who wished to live and create (in Ćosić's view) honestly.

In a 1974 speech sponsored by the Serbian Philosophical Society and given in the aftermath of several years of instability in Serbia that included the Djurić affair and the constitutional amendments, Ćosić presented his new understanding of the role of the intellectual. It was a combative role, one conditioned by his perception that the League of Communists had reached a point where the engaged intellectual was no longer valued. He asserted that "in the history of the world and of this country, the greatest misuses of freedom have always been accomplished by people of power and political passion."<sup>100</sup> One of those mis-



uses was to devalue, fear, and thus limit the contribution of intellectuals. The intellectual was forced to be a hero to fulfill his mission:

...man's thoughts are evil and dangerous to those in power.... As we all know, along with the hemlock, the very root of knowledge and conscience in European culture washes down. And thus from Socrates to Russell, from Dante to Thomas Mann and Mayakovskii, from Galileo to Oppenheimer and Saharov, and on our soil from Vuk Karadžić to the 'moral-politically unsuitable professors' of Belgrade University, one and the same tragedy of the spirit continues with the same protagonists.<sup>101</sup>

In spite of that depressing record of intellectual opposition to power, Ćosić now believed that the struggle against power itself was all that was worthy of the intellectual. He thought that there would always be intellectuals to take up the challenge: "even before the certainty of heaven and the uncertainty of freedom, there will always be an Adam who will choose freedom at any cost and decide for creativity regardless of the sacrifice. Such human decision and power create the ethos of both culture and revolution."<sup>102</sup> Ćosić in fact demanded that type of sacrifice from all intellectuals:

Today, I believe, it is a moral imperative to reveal the pragmatism and hypocrisy of bureaucratic power towards culture, and it is urgent to work concurrently against the intellectual and moral conformism of the so-called honorable intelligentsia, that reserve army of the political bureaucracy, which it ceaselessly places against an intellectual minority that tirelessly serves the greatness of revolutionary ideals and humanistic values.<sup>103</sup>

Such a conclusion must have been difficult for one who was so positively engaged until so recently in the construction of a socialist culture in Yugoslavia, in alliance with power, as one of those "honorable intellectuals." So Ćosić obliquely addressed his own recent past and disillusion:

I would say that we intellectuals, if we are revolutionaries, have no greater historical right to act like the first Christians and to

believe that our revolution represents the salvation of humanity and the end of that world which, otherwise, with pretentiousness and naivete we call "prehistory"; we no longer have reasoned rationales to hope for an imminent final salvation, the impending appearance of a society and epoch which with romantic illusions we call the beginning of 'real history' of humanity.<sup>104</sup>

Ćosić had discarded his own "early Christian" approach to his role in socialism, but he had not abandoned socialism itself: socialism had, he believed, abandoned him. The promise remained: "Socialism is the only soil in today's world in which I believe a truly epochal (according to motifs and content) art can appear. I see it in the synthesis of human tragedy. But, such art can appear only in freedom. To not understand and not accept that provocation of the soul is to remain inadequate before the epoch."<sup>105</sup>

Ćosić offered several prerequisites for the development of a true socialist culture in Yugoslavia:

Given historical conditions, the freedom of creation in socialism, among other things, must consist of: 1) freedom to seek the truth and the right to fight against anyone's lies; 2) the free choice of theme and form of scientific and artistic opinion; 3) society's guarantee that thought and imagination are not sinful and politically criminal, that they not be subjected to any other sanction than the resistance of opposing opinions.<sup>106</sup>

Stripped of its contentious political assertions, this article is vintage Ćosić: declamatory, didactic, but still as always open-ended and imprecise. To what end did the intellectual struggle against the oppressive regime? It is unclear, except that Ćosić seems to believe that the act of creation itself was an end in itself.

What had clearly changed, though, was the place of Ćosić within that socialist world—or, the nature of the socialism of the Yugoslav government, the "power" that defined his place. For Ćosić, Tito's communism had either become, or revealed itself to have been, nothing more than an entrenched bureaucracy interested in power for its own sake. With that revelation in mind, he was forced to reconceive his own role vis-à-vis that power. To the outsider, it may appear

more convincing that it was Ćosić who had changed, and that his new convictions drove him into an adversarial position towards the Tito regime. Either way, the end result was that Ćosić remained just as *engaged* as he had been earlier—but whereas earlier he had been engaged in the creation of a socialist culture, now he was engaged in the discovery and proclamation of the “truth” in the face of bureaucratic absolutism. He was now the embodiment of his own metaphor: his very own “Adam.”

By the late 1970s, Serbian society suffered from a pervasive malaise. After 1974, Yugoslavia seemed to Serbs to be a place that rewarded the nationalism of others but not the loyalty of Serbs; to Serbs, it appeared that Croats had achieved their political goal of limited autonomy, in spite of the fact that their Croatian Spring had been roundly condemned, and many of its leaders imprisoned, only a few years before. For Serbs like Ćosić, the Croats who were thus rewarded were nothing better than Ustaša—in his diaries, Ćosić in fact refers to Vlado Gotovac, Dražen Budiša, Franjo Tuđman, and other leaders of the Spring as “Ustaša and Serbophobes.”<sup>107</sup> On a less visceral plane, Serbian intellectuals bemoaned the death of the *borba mišljenja*, the struggle of ideas, which had enabled them to participate in the ideological life of Yugoslavia, to have a stake in its fate. Now they had been thrust aside. The 1974 constitution taught Serbs that their hopes and their fears were equally irrelevant to the regime. Thus in their own eyes, Serbian intellectuals were doubly cursed. The Yugoslavia in which they lived was no longer a vital and experimental communist state. Now it was a bureaucratic construction, headed by an elite that lived off the fruits of the earlier dynamism of state mythology and the Titoist foundation myth of openness.

## NOTES

1 From Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (New York: TV Books, 1996) 32.

2 Lenard Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milošević* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2001) 53.

3 Founded in 1932, the Kolarac People's University was created in the name of Ilija Kolarac, a nineteenth-century Serbian merchant who wished his

entire wealth to be devoted to the support of the development of Serbian culture. The university was shut down during the Second World War, and its directorate was imprisoned at Banjica, the German camp south of Belgrade. It began to function again on December 27, 1944. Thereafter it once again offered courses for the public and hosted lectures by Yugoslavs and foreigners designed to deal with "contemporary problems of science and life." See "Od srede 27 decembra, počinje rad Kolarčevog narodnog univerziteta," in *Politika* (Belgrade) December 24, 1944, 4.

- 4 Dobrica Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" in Dobrica Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće: Članci i ogledi* (Ljubljana-Zagreb: Cankarjeva založba, 1988) 11–12.
- 5 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 19.
- 6 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 6.
- 7 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 10.
- 8 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 9.
- 9 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 12.
- 10 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 11.
- 11 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 8.
- 12 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 9.
- 13 Ćosić, "Kako da stvaramo sebe," 10.
- 14 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 25.
- 15 Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" 25–26.
- 16 J.S., "Kako se ostvaruje politika nacionalne ravnopravnosti," in *Borba* (Belgrade) May 29, 1968, 5.
- 17 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 185–87.
- 18 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 186.
- 19 Dobrica Ćosić, "Kritika vladajuće ideološke koncepcije u nacionalnoj politici," in Dobrica Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće*, 28.
- 20 Ćosić, "Kritika," 27–28.
- 21 Ćosić, "Kritika," 28.
- 22 Ćosić, "Kritika," 29.
- 23 Ćosić, "Kritika," 30–31.
- 24 Ćosić, "Kritika," 33.
- 25 Ćosić, "Kritika," 31.
- 26 Ćosić, "Kritika," 32.
- 27 Ćosić, "Kritika," 31.
- 28 Ćosić, "Kritika," 32.
- 29 Ćosić, "Kritika," 33.
- 30 Ćosić, "Kritika," 36.
- 31 Ćosić, "Kritika," 37.
- 32 Ćosić, "Kritika," 40.
- 33 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 196–97.
- 34 *Žež*, 1510 (Belgrade) 7 June 1968.
- 35 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 185–200.

- 36 Draža Marković, *Život i politika, 1967–1978* (Belgrade: Rad, 1987) v. 1, 74.
- 37 Gligorijević, *Slučajna istorija*, 133. Gligorijević and another Ćosić interviewer, Slavoljub Djukić, in his *Čovek u svom vremenu*, have virtually identical discussions of Ćosić's actions in early June 1968.
- 38 Gligorijević, *Slučajna istorija*, 138.
- 39 Steven L. Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion in Socialist Yugoslavia: Political Decision-Making Since 1966* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 33.
- 40 Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion*, 39.
- 41 Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion*, 41.
- 42 Slavoljub Djukić, *Slom srpskih liberala: Tehnologija političkih obračuna Josipa Broza*. (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1990) 18.
- 43 Slobodan Inić, "Serbia's Historic Defeat," in *New Politics* (Summer 1993) 166.
- 44 Djukić, *Slom*, 25.
- 45 Djukić, *Slom*, 25.
- 46 Quoted in Inić, "Serbia's Historic Defeat," 166.
- 47 Trgovčević, *Istorija*, 137.
- 48 Dobrica Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," in Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće*, 86.
- 49 Dobrica Ćosić, "Duh obnove i savremenosti," in *Delo* v. 16, no. 2 (February 1970) 187. This speech was given to a meeting of the Srpska književna zadruga's assembly on November 24, 1969.
- 50 Trgovčević, *Istorija*, 139; Gligorijević, *Slučajna istorija*, 295–96.
- 51 Vlada Miletić, "Beseda stara i beseda nova," in *NIN* (Belgrade) October 22, 1972, 15.
- 52 Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," 87.
- 53 Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," 87.
- 54 Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," 88.
- 55 Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," 88.
- 56 Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," 94.
- 57 Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," 91.
- 58 Perović, *Zatvaranje kruga*, 367–68, 385; Marković, *Život i politika*, v. 1, 348.
- 59 Trgovčević, *Istorija*, 139.
- 60 Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion*, 211.
- 61 Andrija Gams, "Konceptije amandmana: istorijski promašaj," in *Intervju* (Belgrade) August 4, 1989, 14.
- 62 Gams, "Konceptije amandmana," 16.
- 63 Kosta Čavoški, "Ustavnost i pravo veta," in Kosta Čavoški, *Revolucionarni makiavelizam i drugi eseji* (Belgrade: Rad, 1989) 273.
- 64 Djurić's presentation is reprinted as "Smišljene smutnje" in Mihailo Djurić, *Iskustvo razlike* (Belgrade: Tersit and BIGZ, 1994) 11–17. This quote is on p. 11.

- 65 Djurić, "Smišljene smutnje," 12–13.
- 66 Djurić, "Smišljene smutnje," 13.
- 67 Djurić, "Smišljene smutnje," 14.
- 68 Djurić, "Smišljene smutnje," 17.
- 69 Gams, "Konceptije amandmana," 14.
- 70 Slavoljub Djukić, "Nasilje nad mišljenjem," in *NIN* (Belgrade) May 28, 1989, 23.
- 71 Djukić, *Slom*, 144–45.
- 72 See the entire issue of *Umetnost: Časopis za likovne umetnosti i kritiku* (Belgrade) no. 27–28, July–December 1971.
- 73 Mihailo Djurić, "Obrana pred sudom," in *Iskustvo razlike*, 31.
- 74 *Umetnost*, 52.
- 75 *Umetnost*, 52.
- 76 *Umetnost*, 53.
- 77 *Umetnost*, 63.
- 78 *Umetnost*, 148; from a long letter to *Književne novine* of December 21, 1970.
- 79 *Umetnost*, 198.
- 80 *Umetnost*, 81.
- 81 *Umetnost*, 198.
- 82 *Umetnost*, 151.
- 83 *Umetnost*, 246.
- 84 Mihiz, "Obretenije glave Vladike Rada," in Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 40–41.
- 85 *Umetnost*, 187.
- 86 *Umetnost*, 204.
- 87 *Umetnost*, 246.
- 88 "Za slobodu akademske diskusije," *Praxis* (Zagreb) v. 9, no. 3–4 (May – August, 1972) 611.
- 89 "Za slobodu akademske diskusije," 612.
- 90 The issue of *Filozofija* in question, volume 2 of 1972, was confiscated by the censors, so the contents were not publicly available for many years. Ćosić's talk is reprinted in Dobrica Ćosić, "Procesi, presude, i naivna pitanja," in *Svarno i moguće*, 96–111.
- 91 Ćosić, "Procesi," 104.
- 92 Ćosić, "Procesi," 106.
- 93 Ćosić, "Procesi," 109.
- 94 Ćosić, "Procesi," 111. On Ćosić's primary authorship of the passage, see Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 98.
- 95 Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, 321–23.
- 96 Djukić, *Slom*, 27.
- 97 Djukić, *Slom*, 321–22.
- 98 Vojin Dimitrijević, "The 1974 Constitution as a Factor in the Collapse of Yugoslavia, or as a Sign of Decaying Totalitarianism," in Nebojša Popov,

- ed., *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest and New York: Central European University, 2000) 419–20.
- 99 Vojin Dimitrijević, “The 1974 Constitution and Constitutional Process as a Factor in the Collapse of Yugoslavia,” in Payam Akhavan and Robert Howse, eds., *Yugoslavia: the Former and the Future* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, and The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 1995) 53.
- 100 Dobrica Ćosić, “Kultura i revolucija,” in *Praxis* (1974) 520.
- 101 Ćosić, “Kultura i revolucija,” 516.
- 102 Ćosić, “Kultura i revolucija,” 516.
- 103 Ćosić, “Kultura i revolucija,” 517.
- 104 Ćosić, “Kultura i revolucija,” 517.
- 105 Ćosić, “Kultura i revolucija,” 519–20.
- 106 Ćosić, “Kultura i revolucija,” 520–21.
- 107 Ćosić, *Pisčevi zapisi (1969–1980)*, 323





## CHAPTER 7

# Ćosić and Popović Return to Serbia

The 1970s were a barren and lonely time for Serbian intellectuals and cultural figures. The Letter spelled the end of their real or even imagined participation in Yugoslav political life. The 1974 Constitution, many believed, purposefully spited Serbian interests. Yet, notwithstanding the closing of virtually all avenues for intellectual engagement, Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović produced their most important work in these years. They did so as much of the Serbian cultural elite sullenly withdrew from public life. Ćosić's *Time of Death* (*Vreme smrti*) and Popović's later Scenes paintings, however, would begin the invention of a new Serbian self-image, and would do so in a self-consciously revelatory fashion. Both men would suggest that in the face of a supremely rational ideological force, bolshevism, which had become corrupted from within, only the artist could successfully seek and elucidate truths, truths that were by definition transcendent.

Ćosić moved from direct engagement with Titoist reality to broader comment on the course and nature of Serbian history. Between 1972 and 1975, his three-volume *Time of Death* appeared. Of all of Ćosić's novels, this is the one that Serbs feel defines him as one of Serbia's literary masters.<sup>1</sup> The novel follows the fate of the Katić family and, uniquely for Ćosić, Serbia itself, during 1915—a year in which Serbia nobly defended itself against Austrian attack, but eventually fell to superior Austrian, German, and Bulgarian forces in the late fall, leading to the famous “flight in winter”: the withdrawal of Serbian forces, the Serbian government, and thousands of Serbian civilians through the mountains of Albania to the Adriatic coast. *Time of Death* was like *Divisions* in that it examined the attitudes of a number of Serbs at a fateful moment, faced with grave choices. Unlike *Divisions*, in *Time of Death* Ćosić did not seek to explain a Serbian evil; rather,

he sought to examine Serbian responses to evil, in the form of Serbia's abandonment by the west, by its allies, by allegedly civilized peoples with whom Serbs shared moral values and the love of liberty. In moving from the evil within to the evil perpetrated from without, the novel reflects Ćosić's personal shift, the same shift that took him from the party to the Serbian Literary Guild. The betrayals he describes in *Time of Death* provide the context for an extremely introspective novel about the actions of Serbs in the face of tragedy. In *Time of Death*, Serbs would become the victims of their own reverence for western values, their love of liberty.

In *Time of Death*, as in *Divisions*, the reader comes to an understanding of the characters' motivations via interminable, didactic, unspoken monologues and long, pontificating, often maudlin exchanges between characters. Ćosić adopted a two-tiered approach to his examination of Serbia's fateful 1915. The global tier, the basic structure of the novel, involves the answer of the Serbian government to its allies' demand that it agree to cede Macedonia to Bulgaria in order to assure Bulgaria's adherence to the Quadruple Entente (Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy) and forestall Germany's drive to create a safe corridor to Istanbul. On this level, Ćosić incorporates historical figures into his story. King Petar Karadjordjević, Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjević, Vojvoda Radomir Putnik, Vojvoda Živojin Mišić, Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis, and above all Nikola Pašić join the fictional Vukašin Katić as Serbs struggle to decide whether to submit to the blackmail of their allies, who refuse to acknowledge any responsibility for Serbia's fate if the Serbian government refuses to accede to their wish that Macedonia be given to Bulgaria. In his preoccupation with the thoughts and feelings of his Serbs, Ćosić never allows for the possibility that they might have brought their fate upon themselves in any way. On this global level, *Time of Death* established Ćosić's coda: Serbs are victims, often of those who should be their friends.

The second tier is local, and here the novel examines the destinies of Vukašin (a resolute opposition politician, a republican), his wife Olga, his children Milena (who volunteers as a nurse in the Valjevo hospital) and Ivan (a student volunteer in the army who is taken prisoner by the Austrians), and a host of others recognizable from his earlier Prerovo novels: Ćim Katić, Adam Katić, Djordje Katić, Tola Dačić, and Aleksa Dačić. In addition, Ćosić introduces new characters

to bring to life other aspects of the Serbian dilemma: Bogdan Dragović (a socialist friend of Ivan who falls in love with Milena), Major Gavriilo Stanković (a patient in the Valjevo hospital), Doctors Mihajlo Radić and Paun Aleksić (who work in that hospital with Milena), Najdan Tosić (Olga's cousin, a businessman and war profiteer), and Bora Jackpot and several others in Ivan's battalion. On this local level, the novel is populated by many heroes of different stripes, who are confounded by a smattering of "cowards and jackals."<sup>2</sup>

Vukašin Katić returns, this time as the central character in the family saga. In *Time of Death* he is the character closest to Ćosić's own heart (in *Time of Evil* [Vreme zla], a later novel that continues the Katić story through the communist era, Ivan would become Ćosić's alter ego—or the closest thing to it). In fact, Vukašin receives Ćosić's highest praise: "He was that rare kind of person, a man who desired power yet dared to tell everyone the truth. He was a politician, but he loved truth more than power."<sup>3</sup> In *Time of Death*, Vukašin is an oppositionist, the leader of the Independent Radicals, a republican and a constant critic of the other political parties. He is faced with numerous decisions: whether to exploit his power to keep his son Ivan out of battle (he cannot do that, for it would be dishonest), whether to join Nikola Pašić in a government of national unity (nay, for Pašić represents all that he has fought and loathed in his career), and how to respond to Serbia's allies' demands that Serbia give up Macedonia in return for promises of Bosnia, Croatia, and Dalmatia at war's end (after torturous internal debate, he decides Serbia must do so, if it wishes to survive, even if that means succumbing to the blackmail of Serbia's allies).

Other characters help Ćosić illuminate the themes he considers vital to an understanding of Serbia's history. Important among them is Bogdan Dragović, who would become one of the central figures in *Time of Evil*, in whom we see the revolutionary spirit of the Serbs in its elementary, uncorrupted form. Bogdan is Ivan's student battalion comrade, a socialist whose social origins are the opposite of Ivan's (Bogdan's father was a candlemaker, his mother is a weaver). Within the battalion, and later during battle, Bogdan fights the rigid militarism and nationalism of his superiors, who use terror to enforce discipline: "There was no weeping he found harder to bear than the weeping of an old peasant. He couldn't comfort them. What kind of

a choice did they have? They faced poverty and floggings on one side and murder and arson on the other.”<sup>4</sup> Bogdan and Ivan can become friends because Bogdan senses that Ivan “despises the reformers and the middle-class Progressives. He has a wise head on his shoulders and a feeling for justice and goodness.” Bogdan perceives that Ivan will be the agent of the destruction of his father’s world: “Inexperienced as he is, young Katić finds it hard to judge his own father and his class. There is something tragic about him, something that arouses sadness and pity.” But, those like Vukašin Katić “condemn themselves to destruction through their children. In their homes, under their wing, among their spoiled and well-fed children real opponents grow up.”<sup>5</sup> Bogdan is pure goodness and heroism in *Time of Death*, but, as could be expected of Ćosić, his corrupting awaits.

Four themes emerge from the stories that these characters tell: first, that Serbs’ love of freedom has always, and always will, result in tragic levels of self-sacrifice; second, that within Serbian society there are those who would take advantage of that willingness to self-sacrifice to take and wield power unscrupulously; third, that in the face of corruption and deception, one must act in accord with one’s convictions, with the truth. Overarching them all is the fourth phenomenon, the one that made the others possible: the faithlessness of Serbia’s friends. Early in the trilogy, Vukašin establishes the role of freedom in the Serbian psyche: “You know we are a people who have made freedom our destiny....In fact, neither good nor evil, neither wealth nor poverty asks as much of a people as freedom. But we’ve been too obsessed with freedom, both as individuals and as a nation. Because we lived so long in bondage we attach too great a significance to freedom. Such nations can only have a tragic history.”<sup>6</sup> Or, put differently, “nothing,” says Gavriilo Stanković to Apis as Stanković lay dying, “can enslave us as much as our longing for freedom.”<sup>7</sup> It was that love and longing for freedom that led Serbs into this tragic and friendless situation.

The unscrupulous who would degrade the struggle of the Serb for freedom include everyone from the basest social elements to the highest of political powers. Najdan Tosić, Vukašin Katić’s brother in law and a merchant, makes regular appearances that reinforce his amorality, his basic greed and self-interest in the face of tragedy: his personal train car is at the ready to take Vukašin and his family to Greece

throughout the novel. This is a recurrent theme, expressed in various forms. Stevan Rightleg, a soldier whose right leg was amputated by Doctor Mihajlo Radić, a tortured, compassionate soul, tells Radić that he is fine as he is:

It's those behind the lines that need freedom, Doctor. Those thieves and shirkers. Those fine folks—merchants and scoundrels! Those who aren't fit for the army, or so they say, but they're fit enough to pester our wives and sisters while we're having our heads smashed up and our legs sawn off out there. They're all right for our wives—they open their legs for them, for those fucking bastards.<sup>8</sup>

As Belgrade is being bombarded in October 1915, Tričko, one of Ivan's student comrades, sits in a bar with his friends for one last drink. When the café proprietor demands payment, Tričko yells, "We're giving our lives for that café proprietor and his property—this, too, is part of Belgrade. How disgusting!"<sup>9</sup> In another bar, another bartender proclaims "The world is rotten to the core. There's been no worse injustice since Cain killed Abel. Serbia is settling accounts for all the Balkan countries."<sup>10</sup> Stevan Rightleg asks, "Will there be justice after the war, so we can get even with those shirkers and scoundrels, pay them back in their own coin?"<sup>11</sup> At another point in the novel, Apis provided an answer: "The cowards and jackals will come out on top. The future belongs to the worst elements."<sup>12</sup> Only those who spoke the truth could save Serbia from such a fate, but, as we have seen, Ćosić deemed them incapable of exercising power.

This Serbia, alienated and divided within, faced a much more tragic existential dilemma, however: it was abandoned by its allies. One of Ćosić's innovations in *Time of Death* was the regular inclusion of real and imaginary telegrams, excerpts from newspaper articles, and letters between prisoners and their families that relentlessly pound home just how isolated, ignored, and insignificant Serbia was.<sup>13</sup> But the three volumes of the novel do not leave it to history and pseudo-history to prove Ćosić's point. The novel is littered with commentary by heroes and jackals alike attesting to Serbia's abandonment. An old teacher of Vojvoda Živojin Mišić complains to him:

I'm thinking, sir, about the greatest injustice in recent history: the injustice of the Allies toward Serbia. It really is unheard of! At Valjevo we gave our lives for Paris and the French; on the Kolubara we defended the Dardanelles for the English; at Milovac we shed our blood for the Russians and the Ukraine. And on Bačinci we've perished at the hands of our Croatian brothers, giving our lives for their freedom. It's incredible, sir! And that whore Rumania just keeps silent.<sup>14</sup>

Vukašin yells at Pašić during one of their many meetings:

What kind of people are we?...Caught between Asia and Europe, on the frontiers of religions and empires, we have perished foolishly, mourned by no one, perished more for others than ourselves... and we haven't gained a single faithful friend. Wretched and accursed nation! We're the only country in Europe that doesn't have a single true friend. Not one!<sup>15</sup>

Vukašin's solution was to take hold of the problem, define it, take responsibility for Serbia's fate:

We must take as our starting point the fact that the Serbian question has become a European question. Until today we have never solved any of our national problems according to our own will, and by our own efforts. We have fought, but the Great Powers of Europe have decided the outcome of our struggles according to their interests. They have assigned us sometimes victories, sometimes defeats.<sup>16</sup>

For Vukašin, this would eventually mean assenting to the Allied demands, for this was the only option that would save Serbia; the alternative, to continue fighting for a principle, was ridiculous in the face of the Allies' own lack of principles. And in that, there was something noble for Major Gavriilo Stanković, who tells Ivan that

In time of defeat, the victor is humiliated far more often than the vanquished. I have never felt more pride in being a Serb than in these days of defeat. Now that the whole of Europe is at war, just

tell me who can rightly say virtue and justice are on our side! What army dares believe this now? Only ours. And no other. All of them have their own sordid interests and some evil aims.<sup>17</sup>

The injustice of this situation lies in the fact that Serbia entered the war for higher goals. As Nikola Pašić would assert to France's ambassador Boppe,

In rejecting the Austrian ultimatum, Serbia entered the war not only to defend herself. By not accepting the ultimatum from Vienna, Serbia sacrificed herself for the European democracies and Russia. Just as she sacrificed herself for Christianity and Europe in the fourteenth century, in the face of the impending Turkish invasion.<sup>18</sup>

What is lost in this explanation, of course, is any acknowledgment that Serbia might have had a role to play in the outbreak of the war, a role rooted in a higher purpose only if one accepts the goal of the creation of a nation state as divinely sanctioned.

In a letter to his imprisoned son Ivan, as the novel concludes with Vukašin on the Adriatic coast of Albania following the long, murderous retreat through the mountains, Vukašin elaborates on Serbia's position<sup>19</sup>:

We're a small nation with great aims, in conflict with the world and its laws. In our struggle for survival we've defined some of these goals as necessities. Some evolved from our illusions, and of course the hardest have been imposed on us by our enemies and by history.

As for the war itself, Serbia was blameless, nothing more than an excuse for the Great Powers to begin their reckoning:

...the war with the Hapsburg Empire was one we couldn't escape....For understandable reasons events here have been chosen as the pretext for a European war, and judging from what's happening, we're condemned to be its victim. In the trenches we've been defeated by a powerful enemy, and behind the trench-

es we've been betrayed by our allies....Serbia's military collapse was inevitable, but the betrayal by the Allies was not.

Finally, in a conclusion that captured much more than just Vukašin Katić's attitude towards the war, he told Ivan that

We must do all we can to ensure that our defeat in war becomes more than an affair between us and our enemies; we must do our utmost to make the Allies bear the guilt of our tragedy, to make the defeat of Serbia the defeat of Europe and her democracy, and of Russia and her Panslavism. We're building our fate into the fate of the world.

Vukašin seemed to be demanding that the Serbs, in their flight, not allow themselves to lose when it came time to make peace; he seemed to be responding to his own despairing proclamation early in the novel that "the time has come when a small nation can no longer lose a war. It can only lose the peace."<sup>20</sup>

*Time of Death* is unquestionably Ćosić's most popular novel among Serbs. There are numerous reasons for this: its language is the most expressive; its scope is the broadest; it aspires to draw universal truths from its parochial subject matter; it reflected Ćosić's own move from insider to outsider, at a time when Serbs were no longer particularly interested in the literary archaeology of the Partisan victory in the Second World War; and, it examined a topic—the First World War—which Serbs felt had been hidden from them in the Tito era. But most importantly, it came at a time when Serbs had begun to search for explanations for their position in Tito's Yugoslavia, and at a time when many Serbs had begun to conclude that they were the particular victims of Titoism. How could a book that did not even treat Titoism as a subject fill such a need so effectively? The best answer would be that it did so by arguing that Titoism offered nothing new in its treatment of Serbs, that historically Serbs had suffered a repeated and similar fate. Most importantly, the novel introduced for the first time Ćosić's notion that Serbs have traditionally participated in their own degradation because of their a) willingness to sacrifice themselves for higher values and b) their willingness to be seduced by power. *Time of*



*Death* initiated Ćosić's own exploration of these themes, which would become the consuming passions of the Serbian intellectual elite over the next two decades.

As a reward for *Time of Death*, which became an extremely popular novel upon publication, in March, 1977, Ćosić was elevated to full membership in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. In his induction speech, he would establish the theme that would dominate the rest of his career as public intellectual: the necessity of the search for truth in a society that represses that truth, and the ability, even the calling, of the novelist—specifically the historical novelist—to ascertain that truth. Noting first that the writer had become the “inspiration and creator of national and historical consciousness” in the modern era, who “would stand side by side national leaders,” Ćosić then argued that the writer's role had been corrupted by the influence of Marxism, which had established that “the role of judge, God, eternal law, was taken by history.” In the new situation, according to Ćosić, “the mystification of history...is an expression of our powerlessness to find the real movers and actors of the human and national tragedies of our times.”<sup>21</sup> Marxism, then, had ensured that writers lost the ability to discover and tell the truth. The writer's task, Ćosić would argue, was to rediscover that ability.

Ćosić offered a despondent vision of twentieth-century European history. That vision was one of betrayal: despite all of the progress of science, all of the progress of humanistic thought, this was a century of despair, brought on by the deceptions of ideology:

not in a single century has so much been suffered and so much accomplished for change in the circumstances of life as has been done in the twentieth century....The hopes of two generations have been deceived, one after the other. Because although evil became more open than ever, evil in the name of good became more hypocritical than ever.<sup>22</sup>

Serbs suffered more than any others from this hypocrisy:

without any feeling of national conceit and superiority, one must first of all comprehend this fact: in Europe there is not a nation

which in the past two centuries, and especially in the twentieth, pledged so much to the workings of history, sacrificed so much for the liberation and progress, as did the Serbian nation.<sup>23</sup>

This, for Ćosić, and for Serbs in general, would become the *idee fixe*.

Serbia's contribution, according to Ćosić, came both as victim and as executioner. As victim, "we survived Austro-Hungarian, fascist, and Ustaša genocide, and by human losses were taken to the border of biological invalidity." But Ćosić readily recognized that Serbs not only suffered at the hands of others, they also made others suffer. This, in fact, would become an integral part of his argument for the need for a Serbian spiritual renewal:

in the name of 'national policy' and its 'reasons of state' we perpetrated evils of reprisal on other nations. To slaughter and torchings, we returned slaughters and torchings...political movements appeared which represent...perhaps the most difficult spiritual and moral decline of the Serbian people...

Ćosić referred here to the evils of the Četnik movement, but also to the responses of the Partisans, who, nonetheless retained the moral and historical high ground. "Unsatisfied sons, wanting to change the world, rose against their unhappy and disappointed fathers; but for the sons as for the fathers, certain victories on the battlefield were in vain." Those battles, "fratricidal" battles,<sup>24</sup> were betrayed in peace, which was "conceived of as an opportunity to realize various selfish intentions, under different illusions and excuses, in the name of shared interests."<sup>25</sup> Here Ćosić comes to his most critical point: the high ideals of the "unhappy sons," communists, were corrupted by power after the Second World War.

In these conditions of complete degradation, betrayed by outsiders, betrayed by their faith, betrayed by their own people, Ćosić laid out his challenge for the novelist, a challenge that he saw himself answering:

I align myself with those who believe that literature, with its humanistic spirit and truths, is called to overcome existing mis-

takes and disagreements. But for this we need freedom, knowledge, and conscience. We must, thus, above all...defend and confirm the existential values of our collective essence and its historical being.<sup>26</sup>

Because of Serbia's special place in European history, the Serbian writer has a monumental task before him.

The history of the Serbian nation, especially in the twentieth century, offers to the literary art subjects of European and general human character, because the fundamental ideas which moved people in our national history, its spiritual and moral dilemmas, were of general importance, because on our soil, with our blood and spirit, the fate of Europe was decided. Serbian national history, in its local currents and events is not only Serbian, only Balkan, and thus provincial and particular, rather it is European...In the world community of spirit and values, to this point we...exist as a nation; in its creativity, its ethos, its role in history of humanity.<sup>27</sup>

Ćosić, who had just completed *Time of Death*, saw the best vehicle for the task of understanding Serbia's past as the novel. He openly modeled himself on Tolstoy: "At this point I cannot but not remind you of the powerful force from Iasnaia Poliana, who, after Napoleon's wars, shouted out: 'Write the true, honest, history of this century. There is a goal for a lifetime!' This "truthful history" of our century, I see in the novel."<sup>28</sup> Ćosić, of course, saw his own *Time of Death* as his initial contribution to this project; the central theme of the novel is that Serbia stood as an example of all that Europe should have stood for, but was betrayed nevertheless.

Ćosić claimed to have found it impossible to come to terms with Serbia's First World War, the subject of *Time of Death*.

Even after several years of thought, I still have not succeeded as a writer in understanding the most important thing: with what needs and desires, in the name of which goals and misunderstandings did Serbia sacrifice nearly half of itself in the killing fields of the First World War? One must remain silent for a long, long time

over the seven-digit number of dead: one million two hundred fifty seven thousand....Only in the number of martyrs for freedom do we stand at the very top of the European list.

Admittedly incapable of comprehending the sheer numbers and their implications, Ćosić is left to ponder less the role of the writer of historical novels in achieving comprehension and more the existential tragedy of Serbian history. But at this point he re-introduces a notion that would come to obsess him: that Serbs allow themselves to be defeated by the enemy within:

what sort of nation are we, what sort of people are we who give so much for freedom in wars only to remain without it after our very victories? How is it that someone among us, someone in our house, takes that which a much stronger enemy could not take on the battlefield? How is it that people so honorable, proud, brave in war, remain degraded and subservient in peace?<sup>29</sup>

So, what began as reflections on the role of the novelist as an interpreter of the past, ended as reflections on the inscrutability of the Serbian situation: placing Serbia among the exemplary nations of twentieth-century Europe, suggesting Serbia as a test case for understanding the horrors of that century, Ćosić can only conclude that they cannot be understood. "Do I dare to admire so much death, no matter how heroic? Can I be proud of it?" One's inability to understand the past is no reason not to try, however, and in so suggesting, Ćosić opened the door to his own and others' narcissistic search to finally comprehend Serbia's twentieth century, by definition a tragic century.

History challenges our literature to express the conscience of the tragic fate of our nation and to bring rebellion against such a fate. Like every rebellion of the creative consciousness, this poetic one must be a rebellion against a world in which man agrees to be meaningless, degraded, and a victim. We are on that thin borderline from which one strides into the emptiness or steps into a life in which we stand straight and come nearer to our historical ideals.

That which cannot be understood rationally must be understood with creativity. The essence of Serbia's situation was reflected clearly in the details, but the causes of that situation could only be understood via the revelation of the creator's search for truth.

### SHARPER SCENES

Mića Popović's *Scenes* Painting responded directly to the post-Letter atmosphere in Serbia by confronting the new politics of enforced conformity. It did so in three ways: first, it began to explore explicitly Serbian themes; second, it began to incorporate an "anti-Totalitarian" message; and third, it addressed critically the communist promise of a better, more rational, future. In 1971, *Scenes* was a fairly disjointed series of paintings that had few thematic links. By 1974 and the "post-poned" exhibition in Belgrade, the focus had sharpened, albeit invisibly to anyone but Popović or those who saw the works privately. In his 1979 exhibition, *Formal Painting* was not displayed, but Popović was nonetheless attacked by regime critics (and, not for the first time, noted by foreign ones).<sup>30</sup> Opening several months before Tito's death, the insecurity of the government, on display for several years, was heightened due to the president's persistent illness. This exhibition, which spanned the Revolution Day holiday weekend in late November and was seen by thousands of visitors (more and more as the critics savaged it), was viewed by the government as nothing more than a political provocation, its paintings mere opposition placards.<sup>31</sup> The 1979 exhibition showed that an originally engaged yet somewhat circumspect *Scenes* had become considerably more incisive since 1971.

Thematic continuity remained with the original *Scenes*. Popović had honed the social critique embodied in the *Gvozden* paintings, partly by intensifying their topicality and story-board quality by adding actual clippings from *Politika* in ways that enraged his critics. The new *Gvozden Scenes* reinforced the feeling of profound loneliness that accompanied the life of the *gastarbeiter*. Popović continued to use the railway station and carriage as a setting, thereby taking advantage of one of the inherently most lonely voyages, always in the cheap seats (consciously emulating Daumier's *Third Class Carriage*). Among many such paintings, two stand out: *Second Class* (1977), which depicts

Gvozden leaning against the window of the Belgrade–Dortmund train, and *Sparrows* (1974), which shows three men hanging out the window of an ancient second-class carriage, sparrows picking at scraps on its roof. To the loneliness and dirtiness of the voyage Popović adds the juxtaposition of the sparrows, looking for food in an unlikely place. These paintings and many others like them complemented earlier explorations of the train station thematic, examined in chapter 5. Once Gvozden arrived in Germany, his isolation and alienation only grew. *Gvozden Peeps into a Brothel* (1973) portrays a sun-baked Gvozden pressing his hand and face up against the window of a house of ill-repute. Not only can he not find more meaningful human companionship, it is obvious that he cannot afford the services of the prostitute. Worn out and destitute, he sleeps on a park bench in the late fall, shoeless, in *The Last Leaf* (1978). In yet another sleeping scene, a guest-worker snoozes on the street, under signs proclaiming the appearance of a *YU-Group* (1975), second-rate musicians playing for the guest-workers. The inclusion of the homeless sleeper in the scene emphasizes that this is a YU-Group composed of cultural outsiders of all sorts. The Gvozden cycle continued to develop, as Popović intended, as a serial depiction of the life of the guest worker.

But the evolution of Scenes involved more than just an edgier argument against the degradation of the guest worker. Popović had also begun to enhance two qualities present but not emphasized in earlier Scenes: their Serbianness and their anti-Totalitarianism, and another that was not present earlier, a critique of the promise of modernity. With the exception of two paintings, Popović's 1971 Scenes exhibition had displayed little that would connect the painter to a particular national audience. Only *Vuk* and *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends* held any specifically national content, and they did so in different ways. *Vuk*, of course, was a painting of Vuk Karadžić, the nineteenth-century folklorist and creator of the modern Serbian language, but aside from its formal links to Serbian culture and the subject's involvement in Serbian nationalist endeavors, the painting was hardly nationalistic itself. One could argue that *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends* was less tied to a national milieu, given that the people represented were above all just Popović's friends, who happened to be Serbs. But in this case, the subjects of the painting, less iconically Serbian in 1971 than Vuk

Karadžić, were fast becoming modern symbols of nationalism in the eyes of the Tito regime. The government eventually concluded that *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends* represented a threat to social and political stability in Yugoslavia, even if the regime's response would not be offered until 1979; Vuk Karadžić had never suffered the opprobrium of a regime that had proven willing to incorporate national figures into the pantheon of heroes of the underclass, of whom he was clearly one. The same could not be said of Mihiz, Ćosić, Isaković, Stojković, Trifunović, and others among Popović's circle of friends, who had challenged the authority of the state in some way by 1971, and had been defined as part of a "nationalistic" undercurrent in Serbian culture thereafter.

By 1979, Popović had added to his Serbian Scenes (and *Vuk* and *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends* were once again exhibited as well). These new Serbian scenes appeared in two guises: one harkened back to the First World War and used imagery that recalled the torturous withdrawal in the winter of 1915; another emphasized Gvozden's Serbianness and the fate of modern Serbs in Tito's Yugoslavia. Variations on the first type include a First World War era soldier defacating (*Rear End* [n.d.]), which added a layer of degradation, familiar from the Gvozden cycle, to the image of the Serbian soldier from 1914/15, an inherently tragic figure, both in reality and in Serbian historical mythology. A related "Serbian" painting was *Јеврем* (1973), which portrayed a similar figure squatting on a street corner, smoking, wearing a Serbian military cap, at an unclear point in time. But *Јеврем* clearly recalled fateful 1915, the year of the great withdrawal of the Serbian military, government, and many civilians across the snow-swept mountains of northern Albania. Nineteen-fifteen also linked the two types of Serbian Scenes: beneath the painting *Gvozden Blows His Nose on the Platform of the Niš Train Station*, Popović wrote of a Serbian "withdrawal which has lasted since 1915."<sup>32</sup> Presumably, he chose to place these words under Gvozden because Gvozden represented a new "withdrawal," in this case, a migration northward to find sustenance. But by fixing on the year 1915, Popović placed these paintings into a tragic/heroic context that was unmistakable to Serbs, and which had recently been the focus of Dobrica Ćosić's trilogy *Time of Death*.<sup>33</sup>

Less openly but just as obviously Serbian were the paintings *Idyll* (1978) and *Serbs in a Waiting Room* (1978). Only two things make *Serbs in a Waiting Room* Serbian: the copy of *Politika* which lies on the table, and the name that Popović chose for the painting; *Idyll* has only the newspaper to identify its subjects. Otherwise, these paintings simply portray people; unhappy, bored, disgusted people, perhaps, but just people. For Popović, they could have been “Yugoslavs,” one supposes, since they were that as well, but that just indicates how important the choice of title—and of nation—was for him. These bored people are *not* Yugoslavs, they are Serbs, and as such, they reflect Popović’s vision of Serbianness in 1978. Another Ćosić, this time Bora, wrote that “....for Popović these Serbs sit in a third class waiting room and stare into the emptiness, and there is no train. Mića is in fact the poet of these people, tired, drooling, and sleepy, who need to travel somewhere but do not know where...”<sup>34</sup>

These are not the only paintings to revel in Serbian degradation. Others, including *This Nation Sleeps* (1975), which has no obvious Serbian referents but depicts the same people that are in *Serbs in a Waiting Room*, and *Two-Year Guarantee* (1978), which shows Gvozden sleeping on a park bench in Germany with “*Politika*” draped over his head, reinforce the identity between Serbianness and degradation. Reviewers of the 1979 exhibition picked out *Serbs in a Waiting Room* for harsh criticism. But, given the lack of negative response to the 1971 exhibition, which just as clearly focused on fatigue and humiliation, one must assume that those qualities were not subversive in a painting until they were given a national home.

Providing a link between the “Serbian” Scenes and the “anti-Totalitarian” Scenes is a full-sized portrait (measuring close to seven feet high) of *Professor Mihailo Djurić* (1974), the professor from the University of Belgrade Law Faculty who was tried, convicted, and jailed in 1971 as a result of a public speech he gave critiquing several constitutional amendments proposed that year. Djurić became a martyr to the new Titoist mantra of “moral-political suitability” as a result of his jailing, but his speech was in fact nationalistic, the first public enunciation since Ćosić’s in 1968 of the fears that many Serbs felt regarding their own dispersal among several ever more sovereign republics in Yugoslavia. To paint (in 1974) and exhibit (in 1979) a portrait of this man, a longtime friend of Popović and a member of



the Simina 9a commune, was to criticize Titoism. It could plausibly be viewed as an addition to *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends*, but it was also a veritable “monster portrait” (to reuse Popović’s own term) of a new icon in new times—in this case, opposition to the growing authoritarianism of the regime in the name of the new federal order in Yugoslavia.

Popović’s social commentary, moving from the universal early Gvozden paintings to the more directly Serbian themes of *Serbs in a Waiting Room*, *Idyll*, and *Two-Year Guarantee*, remained the crux of Scenes. But some of Popović’s most provocative and effective paintings of this period were metaphorical ruminations on the nature of the society in which he lived and worked. I am calling these his “anti-totalitarian” paintings, borrowing the term that East European oppositionists used to describe their political and ideological setting. The most bracing such image that Popović produced must be that of Popović himself, seated and facing the painter with hand outstretched. In one variation, the words “No, Thanks” are inscribed above his head; in another, “Manipulation” is written across the top. While the images are similarly composed and share a general point, they are really quite different in their particulars. *No, Thanks* (1977) is a vision of quiet determination but also fatigue; Popović is small on the canvas, unprepossessingly dressed, with a set expression on his face and a firm hand raised not to attack nor to defend, but simply to ask that he no longer be asked to accept what power offers him. “I’ll take care of my own needs,” he seems to be saying with his simple hand signal. By 1979, in *Manipulation*,<sup>35</sup> Popović is a larger, more dominating figure, but his nose and mouth, perhaps his eyes as well, are blinded by some sort of wrap; he is in physical and/or mental agony, his hand having been consumed by an object of some sort (Popović later called it a doll), which appears to be acting on its own. From *No, Thanks* to *Manipulation*, the painter has lost the ability to decline; having turned down the offer by power of ideology, world view, way of life, persona, moral compass, he now realizes that it wasn’t an offer at all. The message of *Manipulation* is that the people of the totalitarian state *will* be chewed up by the system that controls them. On a more prosaic level, the figure in *Manipulation* represents the Serbian intellectual, forced into an uncomfortable silence after 1974. Other Scenes fill in the blanks in the anti-totalitarian message. In *The Great Red Jump* (1979), leap-frog

is turned into metaphor as Gvozden, in a white shirt, stands uncomfortably but resignedly with hands on knees as another man in a red shirt and black pants and boots jumps over him (and it helps to know that the word for jump in this case could also mean “trick”). In this case the symbolism is too prominent, perhaps, as Gvozden is what he has always been—the loser—as he provides a leg up to the sycophantic red-shirt who moves ahead thanks to Gvozden’s unwillingly given assistance. In *The Discovery of Breughel* (1974), Popović sits half naked in front of a reworking of Pieter Breughel’s *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind* (1568), Breughel’s blind peasants now sporting melons for heads, but still heading into the void.<sup>36</sup> The melon-heads are of course the people of Tito’s Yugoslavia.

Still others—in fact, a significant number of Scenes—seem to be long-delayed responses to early Titoism’s early faith (as exemplified by the younger Dobrica Ćosić) in the ultimate perfectibility of the modern world. Doesn’t Popović’s own back in *Urbanism* (1975) convey more effectively than any face could the skepticism he feels towards the project of modernity? Aren’t the houses of cards stretched out on a bare wooden table not a stunning rebuke to those who believed so profoundly in humanity’s ability to *create* a perfect modern world? The poet Miodrag Pavlović selected *Urbanism* for special comment: “a painting before which one must stop,” it conveyed a “feeling of anxiety and confinement” without “a final conclusion.”<sup>37</sup> *Urbanism* is exceptional among these Scenes for the fact that it does not include either of the two animal symbols that Popović favored, the monkey and, less commonly, the dog. For Popović, the monkey embodies the darkness it symbolized in earlier artistic eras, but also the more modern image of the “charming entertainer, mischievous child, keen and jolly, the skilled imitator...”<sup>38</sup> In Popović’s paintings, monkeys appear in roles usually reserved for humans, and in symbolically modern or otherwise complex settings: building the house of cards that Popović would examine skeptically in *Urbanism* (*Builder*, in many variations); holding a protractor (*The Planning of the Subhuman*, 1979); smoking a cigarette (*Smoker*, in variations); holding a barbell while balancing on a tightrope (*Balance*, 1981). In most of those paintings, the monkey is a benign presence—the monkey in *Builder*, for instance, seems like he’s in over his head, and represents a critique of those who would construct our modernity.

But in one of the most provocative Scenes paintings of all, the monkey becomes something fierce, even evil, and is joined by Gvozden for their only appearance together. *Gvozden Saves a Poodle or the General and Specific Theory of Relativity* (1978) shows Gvozden lifting a poodle away from a table—in a classroom or laboratory—on which three monkeys busily eviscerate two other larger dogs. The monkeys and the poodle clearly reflect the forces of evil and good respectively, and Gvozden is doing the right thing by saving the poodle. But Tito's dog was a poodle, and it is only when we realize that Popović had allowed himself that heavy-handed metaphor that we understand that Gvozden is benevolently saving the pet of the man who had created the vicious world that was about to devour him and the dog. It's all relative; in this case, to one's relationship to Tito, as the smallest and least powerful, most effete dog of the group survives brutalization.

Reviews of the 1979 exhibition reflected the new content of Scenes but also the reconfigured post-1974 political scene in Yugoslavia, when any straying from the official line brought immediate and usually unrealistic and exaggerated condemnation. The reviewer for *Komunist* waxed simplistic: "...In the case of Mica Popović...we find invective and allusions of political ill will and doubtful value, lamentations on the endangerment of the nation...[and] portraits of his friends, of indeterminate artistic-expressional value and totally unambiguously provocative contents."<sup>39</sup> The lesson of the show, in this reviewer's eyes, was that the state needed to pay more attention to such exhibitions. This reviewer was especially incensed by the inclusion of *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends*, which of course included people like Ćosić, Mihiz, and Trifunović, who were more than a little out of favor with the regime. In *Politika*, Sava Dautović (who has reinvented himself and continues to write in Belgrade today) also attacked Popović personally.<sup>40</sup> "...This very exhibition, because of its supra-artistic messages, demands that a word more be said about the moral-political profile of this artist." He noted (in the type of attack that could be heard repeatedly over the years) that Popović had the benefit of state support for his work before, even when the results were lousy (and here he notes that "The Man From the Oak Forest" and "Thugs" were banned because of antisocialist content). Polemicizing with Popović's catalog assertion that "everything here [in Yugoslavia] is ad hominem," and "as a personality I have always been

a target,” Dautović argued that Popović was just “faced with his own artistic stagnation...” and therefore driven to produce “nationalistic-political abstractions” that were “anti-self-management and antidemocratic.” In particular, Dautović did not appreciate the haloed appearance of Popović and his friends, whose “anti-self-management views are well-known,” in *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends*. Most absurdly, Dautović did not like the placement of *Politika* in several paintings, especially *Gvozden Blows His Nose on the Platform of the Niš Train Station* (where the newspaper, directly under the nose in question, may have received some of the excretion) “in a way that no artistic freedom, because of the dignity of art, could stand.” Dautović also noted Popović’s linking of his paintings with Ćosić’s recent *Time of Death*: under the painting of *Gvozden* at the Niš train station, Popović’s written description talks of “withdrawal which has lasted since 1915.” In *NIN*, Popović found his only remotely friendly reviewer, in Djordje Kadijević, who nevertheless criticized Popović’s vision of late-Titoist Yugoslavia: “Pessimism drawn from a nihilistic vision,” Kadijević wrote, “represents only the converse of apologetic optimism, but it is equally ephemeral.”<sup>41</sup> Also: “The private political comic strip of a painter cannot provoke real social trauma, but it need not be the case either that a dubious component in the work of that painter supercede the real value which that work comprises. The world will not be changed by this exhibition, nor indeed will social reality. Only art may be wounded by it.”<sup>42</sup>

Why were *Scenes* received relatively warmly (at least initially) in 1971, but condemned so pathetically in 1979? There are two possible answers. One, already obvious from the preceding, is that the nature of *Scenes* had changed in important ways. Only a fraction of the 1971 *Scenes* had been socially critical, and they had shared space with still lifes, random portraits, and odd film-inspired sequences. By 1979, the “Serbian” and “Anti-Totalitarian” *Scenes* had become dominant. But they might not have become dominant were it not for the second answer to the question, which is that the nature of the Tito regime had fundamentally changed. In 1971, the regime was still trying to get a handle on the enormous change that it had both inspired and determined to stop. By 1979, the regime had settled on a method of dealing with the outpouring of engagement that the late sixties had produced: marginalize it, illegalize it, move from the *borba mišljenja* to *moralno-*

*politička podobnost*. The resulting Letter and 1974 Constitution were symbols of the regime's fear of initiative and innovation, and on the eve of Tito's death, in fear more often than it inspired fear, it did not much care how ridiculous it looked. What had once been a vibrant and inquisitive society had become a polarized one, with those holding power and those questioning power staring at each other across metaphorical copies of the Letter. The real point, though, is that the relationship of the new Scenes content and the attitude of the regime towards intellectual creativity was dialectic. The anti-Totalitarian and, probably, Serbian Scenes would not have developed as they did were it not for the crackdown of 1972, the Letter, and the 1974 Constitution.

Reviews of the exhibition—purely political, virtually without artistic merit themselves, disinterested in anything but condemnation—exemplify a Yugoslav society and a Yugoslav government which had descended to a creative nadir unmatched since the Second World War. But these reviewers were mostly regime hacks. Sometimes there was a kernel of truth in the hack commentary, though, no matter that it led the reader down a blind alley. For instance, the reviewer from *Komunist* believed (with reason) that Popović had failed to respect his own program, which the reviewer simplistically reduced to the claim that “Scenes painting is...not political painting.”<sup>43</sup> Others, sympathetic with Popović's program, understood that Popović's Scenes represented more than the simple and dispassionate “witnessing” that the painter proclaimed them to be. Popović himself implicitly gave evidence of this flaw in his program of witnessing in an interview from 1979. To his remark (by then virtually boilerplate in his interviews about Scenes) that he had “no intent to accuse anyone or anything” with his paintings, Aleksa Čelebonović (his interviewer) responded that guest workers were not all that oppressed—that they “represent an important component of that which makes us an open country. Our people go and learn a lot while abroad. They return, build new houses, garages, barns...” Popović, something less than a simple witness now, retorted that “it would be better that all of those gardens, fences, and houses were built with funds attained through work at home.”<sup>44</sup> Those who shared Popović's assumptions about the state of Yugoslavia in 1979 were unsurprised by the nature of his “unvarnished” vision. These people included Popović's buyers, who were legion: his paintings have been described as “musts” for collectors in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>45</sup> For

every Dautović, there was a Miodrag Pavlović, Bora Ćosić, or Dobrica Ćosić who expressed a much more positive, and one suspects authentic, view of Popović's "comic strip."

Ćosić's and Popović's work connected in rich and telling ways. It is not entirely clear which of them led the way. Ćosić's *Time of Death* introduced a new form of Ćosićean introspection: always picking at scabs, he moved from picking the scabs that made it impossible for Serbia and Yugoslavia to become part of that mythical modern world he idealized so thoroughly to picking at the scabs of Serbia's twentieth-century humiliation. The contrasts between *Divisions* and *Time of Death* tell the story of Ćosić's transformation: they are both war stories, but they emerge from completely different concerns. Where *Divisions* examines the roots of Serbs' unwillingness to embrace modernity, *Time of Death* examines the world's unwillingness to embrace and reward Serbs' love of freedom, grace under pressure, and general heroism. They are both, however, marked by one of Ćosić's enduring themes, which is the importance of the geopolitical, social, and moral divisions that have historically cursed and tempted Serbs. *Time of Death*'s most important innovation, though, is that it firmly established Ćosić's move from the universal to the parochial, from Yugoslavia to Serbia, from Serbia's integration with the world to the perfection of Serbia itself.

Popović also moved, and like Ćosić, he moved back to Serbia. But Popović's starting point was different. Where Ćosić's concerns had always been local, in that he focused on Yugoslavia and Serbs' need to embrace the new idealism of communism and universalism, Popović had abandoned Yugoslavia and Serbia as anything of particular value in the 1950's; "The Village of Nepričava" had been his first and last attempt to work with Serbian artistic traditions in his own painting. Popović came back to Serbia with the vengeance of one who suddenly realized that his earlier abstract attempts to critique global reality had missed the mark. As noted earlier, he would explain that "those in power... understood relatively quickly that there was nothing to fear from abstract painting."<sup>46</sup> Their moves also differed in critical ways. Where Ćosić had always focused on the moral "interior," the qualities that made people do the things they do, which was reflected in his writing in the "inside-out," endlessly self-flagellating monologues, Popović now repudiated his own devotion to the interior (as represent-

ed by his work in *informel*) for the open world of social and political activism.

Ćosić and Popović allowed or encouraged links between their work. When Popović described Gvozden as participating in a new flight akin to that of Serbia in 1915, he did so in the knowledge that the Flight in Winter had become a new metaphor for betrayal. There is no reason to believe that this reflected anything deeper than a useful coincidence. The real importance of the links between their work is that those links were there because they reflected a deeper reality about the self-image of many Serbs in the 1970s: betrayed by outsiders as well as their own, the implicit solution to the historical dilemma was a revival of Serbian consciousness as such, rather than as part of some utopian universalist commitment. Ultimately, Ćosić provided the coda for both his and Popović's work, in commentary on *Serbs in a Waiting Room*: "These Serbs of Mića's accept their fate patiently, reconciled, astonished, threateningly, but all—silently. For how long, and what then? Mića Popović does not say. Because not a single Serb knows that answer yet. If the answer is the traditional one—then there is no salvation for them..."<sup>47</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 It is also one of just two that have been translated into English (*Daleko je sunce* is the other, but it has not been in print in English for many years).
- 2 Dobrica Ćosić, *Reach to Eternity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980) 167.
- 3 Dobrica Ćosić, *A Time of Death* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978) 158.
- 4 Dobrica Ćosić, *South to Destiny* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981) 128.
- 5 Dobrica Ćosić, *Into the Battle* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983) 34.
- 6 Ćosić, *Into the Battle*, 258.
- 7 Ćosić, *Return to Eternity*, 169.
- 8 Ćosić, *South to Destiny*, 20.
- 9 Ćosić, *South to Destiny*, 133.
- 10 Ćosić, *Into the Battle*, 96.
- 11 Ćosić, *South to Destiny*, 20.
- 12 Ćosić, *Reach to Eternity*, 167.

- 13 The inclusion of historical documents mirrors Popović's use of artifacts—press clippings, for instance—in his Scenes paintings.
- 14 Ćosić, *A Time of Death*, 201.
- 15 Ćosić, *Into the Battle*, 63.
- 16 Ćosić, *Into the Battle*, 129.
- 17 Ćosić, *A Time of Death*, 184.
- 18 Ćosić, *South to Destiny*, 44–45.
- 19 Ćosić, *South to Destiny*, 373–75.
- 20 Ćosić, *Into the Battle*, 64.
- 21 *Pristupne akademijske besede*, v. 308 of *Glas Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti*; Odeljenje jezika i književnosti, v. 9 (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1978) 27–28. This speech would later be republished under the title “Književnost i istorija danas.” I will use that title from here on.
- 22 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 29.
- 23 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 31–32.
- 24 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 32.
- 25 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 32.
- 26 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 33.
- 27 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 34.
- 28 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 34.
- 29 Ćosić, “Književnost i istorija danas,” 36–37.
- 30 Michael Dobbs, in the *Manchester Guardian*, noted that this exhibition was different than earlier ones for Popović's use of newspaper montage. He notes also that many had long been displayed in state art galleries; that the visitors had grown since the state-sponsored attacks; and that the Djurić portrait especially angered the government. Michael Dobbs, “Critics Jump to Tito's Defence,” in *The Manchester Guardian* (Manchester) December 12, 1979, 8. See also Dessa Trevisan, “Uproar over Belgrade Art Show,” in *The Times* (London) December 12, 1979, 7.
- 31 R.K., “Filosofija ‘svevidećeg oka,’” in *Komunist* (Belgrade) December 14, 1979, 18–19.
- 32 Sava Dautović, “Izložba političkog pamfletizma,” in *Politika* (Belgrade) December 10, 1979, 12.
- 33 Dautović, “Izložba,” 12.
- 34 Bora Ćosić, “Teatar Miće Popovića,” 178.
- 35 There are two of them—Serbian: with the word; American: without the word—according to Ćosić in *Mića Popović*, 176; the Serbian version is harsher and darker, the American lighter, Ćosić argues.
- 36 Ćosić, an admirer, was reserved: “I don't have Mića's strength to see the drama of history as a farce, or tragedy as grotesque.” Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 180.
- 37 Miodrag Pavlović, *Nove slikarske godine Miće Popovića* (Apatin: Merkur, 1979) xxx.
- 38 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 103.



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- 39 R.K., "Filosofija," 19.
- 40 Dautović, "Izložba," 12. Dautović's review is an obvious example of the sort of pre-planned politicized criticism that usually emanated from some party committee.
- 41 Djordje Kadijević, "Spoj nespojivog," in *NIN* (Belgrade) December 16, 1979, 33.
- 42 Kadijević, "Spoj nespojivog," 33.
- 43 R.K., "Filosofija," 18.
- 44 Čelebonović, "Razgovori."
- 45 Irina Subotić, "Mića Popović: Od materije do materijala u njegove iluzije" (Kruševac: Umetnička galerija, 29.V.-10.VII.1995) 7.
- 46 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 31.
- 47 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 198.



## CHAPTER 8

# From Principle to Catharsis

Several days after Tito died in 1980, Dobrica Ćosić found himself walking down Terazije in downtown Belgrade as long columns of Yugoslavs moved along a procession to visit Tito's casket: "I felt a chill walking along the opposite side of the street from the people; I felt alone, totally separated, the first time I had felt such isolation, that division from the people, from the people of my country."<sup>1</sup> Ćosić felt that he understood something that had yet to dawn on his countrymen: that Tito, the "greatest enemy of my people in the last century,"<sup>2</sup> had hated and manipulated the Serbs. He derisively (but privately) referred to Titoism as the "titovina" and the "titolatrija," implying that Tito had become a system rather than a man. He refused to believe that the death of Tito would bring "the end of Stalinism, Titoism, bureaucratic tyranny."<sup>3</sup> Of course he was right: the people that Tito left behind to run Yugoslavia had little initiative and spent an inordinate amount of time buttressing their legitimacy by defending the dead leader's name and reputation. Ćosić would gradually emerge from that darkness of May 1980 as more and more of his people came to share his convictions regarding Tito and Titoism. His role as messenger was critical in the 1980s, and by 1991, Ćosić felt comfortable enough to proclaim himself "Public Enemy Number One: good for 200 years in prison!"<sup>4</sup> While he never spent a day in prison, this was an image that suited him.

As an activist, Ćosić and others who followed his lead spent the 1980s implementing once again the strategy that he had tried in the late 1960s, via the directorate of the Serbian Literary Guild, when he gathered a cross-section of Serbian intellectuals of differing ideological persuasions in an attempt to nurture the dying tradition of intellectual involvement in the important public and governmental discussions of

the day. Two important threads would initially run through this work: first, in spite of his own convinced socialist commitment, Ćosić would insist on the inclusion of ideological opponents in these initiatives; second, where appropriate, he would attempt to make them Yugoslav rather than Serbian in focus and composition. The committees that Ćosić initiated included the proposed editorial board of the journal *Javnost* (The Public), in 1980; the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression, active from 1984 to 1989; and the committee formed by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1985 to formulate what would become known as the "Memorandum." In addition, one could include the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom, formed in 1982; various formal and informal groupings of intellectuals in and out of the Serbian Writers' Association; and the signers of numerous protest petitions, among the results of the commitment to work across ideological boundaries to gather the best talent that Serbian had to offer. Together, the work of these committees and informal groupings illuminates not only the trajectory of the development of a Serbian nationalist movement in the 1980s, but also some of the incredibly strange attributes of that movement when it finally reached full flower. During the decade of the committees, a movement that began as a principled search for the freedom of expression turned into an outpouring of cathartic nationalism.

#### REACTIVATING THE *BORBA MIŠLJENJA*

The first of the committees was a short-lived but enlightening failure. It was born in October of 1980, with a failed attempt to create a new "independent socialist" journal called *Javnost*, named after another journal founded by Svetozar Marković a century before. Ćosić and Ljubomir Tadić, in the name of a committee of nine, appealed to 410 intellectuals across Yugoslavia to support such an initiative. They claimed to have received 120 positive responses, with only 4 refusals.<sup>5</sup> They outlined the journal's task:

We will attempt to think about current intellectual and moral responsibilities, about material and spiritual creativity and morals, about social and human values, about the freedom and dignity of the human personality and civil rights in our country—in a word,

about the developmental, ideological, and civilizational problems facing our society and its future, about the world in which we live and the place that we occupy in it, in the spirit of our people's traditions of liberty and with a vision of socialism inseparable from democracy.<sup>6</sup>

Ćosić clearly drafted this section, which rings with the idealistic yet imprecise rhetoric that dominated all of his philosophical pieces from the 1950s on. But the remainder of the long call to arms represented by the letter soliciting support for *Јавност* indicates Ćosić's more aggressive visage, post-Tito, and offers insight into the goals and, perhaps more importantly, methods, of this "enemy number one of the regime" in 1981.

In suitably vague language, the letter addressed the problem of responsibility and succession in Yugoslavia, so compromised by Tito's egoistic establishment of weak, rotating party and state presidencies. It also attacked the anti-intellectualism of late Titoism. Ćosić argued for the inclusion of intellectuals in the public's business: "Our...paths to the future have never been more complicated and uncertain, and because of that we must share and distribute the responsibility for our survival ...concern for the future dare not be anyone's privilege..."<sup>7</sup> According to the Ćosić/Tadić letter, the complications and uncertainties included bureaucracy, social inequality, national insularity, national inequality, closed decision-making processes, the fear of free expression, the existence of taboo themes, and the fear of those who disagreed with the governing ideology of self-management.<sup>8</sup> The letter also described "a serious crisis in the organization of society...which conditions today's economic crisis and has brought us to a distressing stagnation in society," which could only have been an indictment of the 1974 constitution. The solution to these problems would begin with the "sharing of responsibility," including public debate and open decision-making, with contributions from outside the party: "...there is no true public without the free expression of ideas about the general work and goals of the social community, nor without the free action of members of the community to the creation of their civil rights and the goals of society."<sup>9</sup> Without real change, there was danger that "the entire society will turn to the past, to the model which we successfully began to overcome in 1948..."—Stalinism, of course. In his diary,

Ćosić would bemoan the fact that “in our society there is no possibility for the public use of the intellect. Such a situation makes our entire people historically immature.”<sup>10</sup> *Javnost* was an attempt to overcome that immaturity, to place the cumulative intellects of Yugoslavia at the service of the state and its people. It was a direct challenge to the establishment of “moral-political suitability” as a litmus test for political competence after 1971.

Ćosić reports that the journal had originally been planned in late 1979, but that respect for Tito, who was on his deathbed, precluded any public pronouncements at that point. Speaking in 1989, he said that

...today I am sorry [that they postponed it], because the rebellion in Poland quickly broke out, with the intellectuals of KOR standing behind it. Our cultural and political history was thus deprived of the modest advantage of having formulated a socialistic-alternative program for the reform of society and of Yugoslavia before the Poles [formulated theirs for Poland].<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the respect that they had shown the dying Tito, a year later their initiative would nonetheless be condemned by the party, and Ćosić would once again be labeled a nationalist for his efforts. In November 1980, for instance, the Belgrade committee of the Socialist Alliance of Working People called it an “attempt at the creation of an opposition platform, which would gather all enemies of our social system.”<sup>12</sup> Those enemies would work from “anarcholiberal, nationalistic, and other anti-self-management positions in order to attack all of the achievements of our self-managing socialist society.”<sup>13</sup> In the same month, the government refused the group’s application to publish *Javnost*.

The *Javnost* letter presaged a great chasm that would emerge in the various diagnoses of Yugoslavia’s ills, post-Tito. While recognizing the same problem—the debt crisis and internal backwardness—proposed solutions continued to reflect regional, and then national, differences. For instance, a Slovene opposition would emphasize the need for more republican autonomy. The Slovenes also requested to be allowed to publish a new, critical journal, which they called *Nova revija*, in 1980, and did so using arguments that could well have been used by Ćosić

and Tadić when proposing *Јавност*.<sup>14</sup> One important difference was that the government allowed *Nova revija* to publish, where it had denied *Јавност*. Another was that *Јавност* was imagined as a Yugoslav journal, while *Nova revija* was strictly Slovenian. But the fact remains that in both instances, re-engagement, or more substantive engagement, was the goal of the journals' promoters. Whereas the Slovenes would assert the right of republics to develop free of federal influence (eventually arguing that republics had the right to secession), the Serbian position was and would remain the opposite: that the confederation of the state had destroyed a unified market, which led to economic disfunction, and that the situation had been exacerbated by the ostracism of Yugoslavia's intellectuals. The Serbian originators of *Јавност* offered a grand, universal solution to those problems: free speech and the engagement of intellectuals in the quest for solutions to Yugoslavia's many problems. This would be the activist, societal counterpart to Ćosić's novelistic crusade for "truth" and would galvanize the Serbian opposition in the 1980s. The *Јавност* episode kicked off the quest for free speech, which would become the focus of the work of Serbia's intellectuals during the first half of the 1980s.

#### THE MIXED LESSON OF THE GOJKO DJOGO AFFAIR

The second great gathering of talent in Serbia following the death of Tito came about without the obvious participation of Ćosić. Called the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom, it was formed in May 1982 as the direct result of an extended shadow-play between the government and Serbian writers, which in turn gave rise to the first critical transition in the new *borba mišljenja*. The immediate occasion for the formation of the committee was the arrest and trial of a poet named Gojko Djogo, whose story has been told elsewhere in sufficient detail to allow us here to focus on its few critical details.<sup>15</sup> In June 1981, the Serbian government accused Djogo of publishing "enemy propaganda" in the form of his poetry collection entitled *Wooly Times* (*Vunena vremena*).<sup>16</sup> *Wooly Times* appeared in bookstores on April 30, 1981, just short of the one-year anniversary of Tito's death, courtesy of the Prosveta publishing house, the largest in Serbia.<sup>17</sup> On May 12, the editor-in-chief of Prosveta, the literary critic Petar Džadžić, received his complementary copy and apparently read the poems for

the first time. The next day, Džadžić ordered remaining copies pulled from bookstores. The self-managing council of Prosveta then met and condemned the collection, "which," it asserted, "insults our revolution and its achievements as well as the most holy personality of our revolution." Twenty-six copies had already been sold, Djogo had given seven to friends, and he held twenty-two copies, all of which were confiscated and destroyed (save three that were turned over to the public prosecutor of the district of Belgrade).<sup>18</sup> Journalists quoted Džadžić as saying that *Wooly Times* was

an unambiguously hostile book, with direct inflammatory allusions which are absolutely clear. No one can convince me that they have multiple meanings. They go in only one direction. I am a man of culture; for years I have worked in literary criticism, so how can you think that I would not defend poetry? I would defend it, but in this case, there is nothing for me to defend.<sup>19</sup>

The writer for *NIN* declared extravagantly that *Wooly Times* was a product of an "unquenched malice" such as art had never seen. The issue, of course, was that several of the poems appeared to criticize Tito. On May 14, Djogo himself wrote to Džadžić to express his disbelief that a book of poetry could be condemned to destruction. He adopted a position diametrically opposed to that of Džadžić:

Since I have not been given the opportunity to say anything, I turn to you in this way in the crazy hope that I will at least contribute to the elimination of misunderstanding. That misunderstanding is, above all, aesthetic. I think that my poems are being read in precisely the way that poetry should not be read. Because he who agrees to "interpret" metaphors can attribute to them any meaning...<sup>20</sup>

Djogo's assertion would be taken up by his defenders, who insisted that the poetry in *Wooly Times* could not be treated literally, nor could it be allowed to be interpreted by a court of law. Above all, they argued that no one should be imprisoned for their art.

The Gojko Djogo "affair" is more often the subject of comment than is Djogo's poetry, which is worth a look, given the distinct and divergent positions taken by the state and the literary community of



Belgrade.<sup>21</sup> The collection included forty poems, of which several provoked particular outrage among the Serbian authorities. For instance, “The Shrine of Father Blackgod” lamented that

our year has lasted a torturous forty years  
and still has not ended.  
our saint will never die,  
we count the years behind him,  
he is younger than last year  
and he has new teeth, canines...

To this lament that while Tito (or some “saint”) had died, his spirit was younger and more vicious than ever, Djogo added “The Ballad of Caesar’s Head,” in which he described a bronze head that sustained and kept order in society:

one little spoonful of its brain  
feeds twenty million heads.  
When we slaughter each other around the table,  
with a thunderbolt  
it quiets both victims and killers.

Tito—or better, his image—demands that his people be a perfect reflection of his image. That foundation myth of “brotherhood and unity” becomes, for Djogo, an excuse for “Caesar’s Head” to enforce ignorance of the dangerous national relations in the state “with a thunderbolt”—his voice, his word. “The Viper on Republic Square” refers to “the old rat from Dedinje,” and to Serbs who are “only stupid sheep.” And finally, “The Greatest Beast” describes an emperor who

strangled in the dark his best comrades  
and swallowed his children.

And now he lies dead  
and crazy animals lick his paws,  
the cattle do not believe their snouts:  
did he die, is he just silent?

No one dares touch his tail  
or put a mirror to his nose,  
the beast could be resurrected  
and sit on the Throne.

It is difficult not to pick up clear references to Tito, even without the most obvious of them all: “the rat from Dedinje.” Perhaps the most interesting line was that which asks “did he die, or is he just silent?” The underlying question was, would those who followed Tito in power in Yugoslavia—nonentities, because he had “strangled his best comrades”—liberate themselves from his crushing after-death presence, or continue to rule through his personal mythology? Djogo himself would be a victim of the insecurity felt by governing elite’s after Tito’s death—insecurity that drove them to defend the reputation of a dead man, because their own claim to legitimacy was so difficult to defend on its merits.

At the various meetings that ensued—of the self-managing council of Prosveta, the district committee of the League of Communists, and of the City Committee of the Belgrade League of Communists—Djogo was not allowed to participate. His only defense before his trial was in the form of an emotional, somewhat pathetic letter to the Serbian Writers’ Association, written on May 23, 1981, and which was made public five months later by the emigré magazine *Naša reč* of London. In it, Djogo recounted the refusal of all of the authorities presiding over his prosecution to allow him to speak in his own defense. He explained that he wrote this letter to the UKS, following the destruction of his book, so that

a trace will at least remain. Even Jesus’ life was not as important as the trace he left behind. I think that the trace is the miserable hope of any writer....I came to tell you—because most of you know me as a writer and as a person—that this is all an unfortunate misunderstanding, a sad page in our culture and, regarding the book and regarding me, a repulsive lie.

Djogo insists that he has been misunderstood, that as art his poetry defies literal interpretation: “The poet is inside, the reader outside, before well-locked doors. Neither has a key.”<sup>22</sup>

Much like Djogo, who claimed he was misinterpreted, those Serbian cultural figures who responded to Djogo's plight chose to frame his conviction as an assault on artistic freedom: a poet should not be judged in a court of law for his poetry. Beyond that, supporters of Djogo asserted that the government position was based on a hostile understanding of his poetry, which could be read in many ways. This was not the only position that could have been adopted by Djogo's supporters. After all, one year after Tito's death, no one could be too confused about the nature and intent of Djogo's poetry. Yet absolutely no one defended Djogo's right to critique Tito, self-management, or the "achievements of the revolution."<sup>23</sup> Instead, those who rose in Djogo's defense proposed that the poet may have been misinterpreted, that, as Djogo himself asserted, all of the censure he endured was a "repulsive lie." The response of the more critical members of the intelligentsia to Djogo's indictment was swift and asserted the principle of *višeznačnost* (multiple meanings). But their petitions were invisible to Yugoslavs, as they were only published abroad. Dozens of writers, including Ćosić, Mihiz, Pavle Ivić, and Antonije Isaković, fired off joint letters to the Presidency of the Republic of Serbia by mid-June, and Žika Stojković sent a protest letter to the district court of Belgrade, copying it to *Politika* and *Književne novine*. While those papers refused to publish it, London's *Naša reč* did so, opening Stojković to accusations that he was in collusion with the anti-communist emigration.<sup>24</sup> All of these protests insisted that the court was not the place to interpret poetry. Stojković went further:

Like many others of his type, his crime is only that he is in fact a poet. In their greatest moments, poets escape themselves and the poem is not just their "other I," but something totally its own, in and of itself. No one can fully understand poets, believe me!....Be suspicious, and of the poet Djogo, why not; anything can be found in the ashes of his collection, *anything*, but not *something*.<sup>25</sup>

Forgive him, judge, he knows not what he writes! Or, in the cool estimation of the petition signed by Ćosić and Ivić, "poetry is judged by literary criticism," not courts of law. Instead of defending Djogo's right to criticize the system and its dead leader, they defended Djogo's act, whose meaning, they would consistently argue, remained ultimately

indecipherable. This approach entailed extended play-acting by the accused and his supporters—what a later observer would describe as “degradation of the poet, his colleagues, and the entire national culture” before the party-state.<sup>26</sup> This defense of one’s right to say what one wished was principled and not without precedent in Serbia. The *Praxis* philosophers’ defense of Mihailo Djurić, which distanced itself from the substance of Djurić’s presentation while defending his right to speak freely, was an earlier example. The key difference in 1981 is that no one embraced *or* distanced themselves from Djogo’s characterization of Tito. Whereas the classic, Voltarian, conceptualization of free speech poses a dialectic relationship between speech and criticism of it, this free speech movement began with the setting of an idiosyncratic precedent according to which anything could be said and defended on principled grounds, while the content of that speech was not subjected to open critique. This approach would have some really ugly consequences.

Djogo was arrested for violating Article 133 of the Yugoslav constitution, which defined the crime of *verbalni delikt* (verbal transgression), which, together with the application of the notion of “moral-political suitability,” stood as the most telling symbol of late Titoist bureaucratic administration. The *verbalni delikt* was, in the government’s eyes, a form of “hostile enemy propaganda,” and could be interpreted broadly at the discretion of the government. Djogo’s trial occupied two days in July 1981 and another in September. The trial did reveal some interesting details: that Djogo, for instance, had submitted a different collection of poems to Prosveta, which accepted them, and then substituted other poems in the final version, which the editors did not take the time to check. And the book’s editor, Branislav Petrović, claimed that the reason he did not perceive the negative allusions to Tito and the revolution was that he could “only link beautiful words” with “the greatest person of our epoch” and “the greatest symbol of our revolution.” Djogo himself made a similar argument: that the average reader would never have made the connection between his poetry and Tito, whom Yugoslavs universally loved. Nevertheless, he was sentenced to two years in prison on September 17, 1981.

The Djogo affair’s legendary offspring, the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom, was formed on May 19, 1982<sup>27</sup> at a meeting of the Belgrade section of the Serbian Writers’ Association,

at the urging of Biljana Jovanović, a young writer, and Dragoslav Mihailović, the survivor of Goli Otok and author of *When the Pumpkins Blossomed*, *Petrija's Wreath*, and other novels. Its members included Desanka Maksimović, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Stevan Raičković, Predrag Palavestra, Milovan Danojlić, Raša Livada, and Jovanović. Livada was elected first chairman of the committee, but he resigned after a year, and Danojlić took over as president. Ivan Čolović replaced Livada on the committee.<sup>28</sup> The CPAF drafted an outline of its goals at its meeting of September 20, 1982. That draft included the following points: the CPAF would a) nurture the protection of artistic freedom; b) help expand support for artistic freedom in society; and c) take it upon itself to inform the public when artistic freedom was violated. The committee also agreed that its votes be taken by simple majority (Mihiz would later write that every communiqué issued by the committee was supported unanimously).<sup>29</sup>

By early 1983, the CPAF had issued several protests, addressing all of the known offenses against artistic and literary production to that point, including the cancellation of Jovan Radulović's play *Pigeon Hole* (Golubnjača) and attacks on several notable books: Dobrica Ćosić's *The Real and the Possible* (Stvarno i moguće), Antonije Isaković's *Flash II* (Tren II), and Vuk Drašković's *The Knife* (Nož).<sup>30</sup> Then on March 28, 1983, Gojko Djogo left for prison to serve a reduced one-year sentence. That night, the UKS held its first "protest Monday," as they would come to be called. At that point, in the view of Miodrag Perišić (later the editor of *Književne novine*), "the Writers' Association was jerked from its long socialist-realist dream" and "began to protest openly."<sup>31</sup> Forty writers came to the UKS that night, including Ćosić and Mihiz, neither of whom was then a member.<sup>32</sup> Others followed on April 11, April 18, and April 25. Mihiz later described the first "Djogo Monday," which

filled the hall of the entry to the Writers' Association, its stairs, entryway, and the street, with listeners who for the first time in postwar Belgrade listened to publicly expressed protests against the behavior of the government. The police stashed wagons of militia in side streets to prevent any eventual attempt to turn the protest meeting into a street demonstration, but the liberated territory of Francuska 7 was never returned to the government.<sup>33</sup>

“Francuska 7,” on the corner of Francuska and Simina and just a few short blocks from Simina 9a, became from that point a symbol of democratic renewal in Serbia. The nature of that renewal would change over time, but in 1983, there can be little doubt that this was the single institution in Serbia that had decided, collectively, to attempt to come to terms with its subservient past.

There remain some questions about the Djogo affair. For instance, why did Djogo and his supporters engage in the mental gymnastics of asserting the *višeznačnost* of poetry instead of simply acknowledging that in his poems he intended to call into question the Tito cult, which surely existed? Their argument for artistic freedom was valid whether they asserted the inscrutability of the poetic mind or that Tito’s cult needed to be questioned. After all, Djogo did mean to malign Tito. Nonetheless, it is possible that a permutation of the argument used in court has limited validity: not that readers would never read Tito into Djogo’s poetry, but that Yugoslavs—including Djogo’s writer-colleagues—were not psychologically prepared to contest the cult of personality erected around Tito. And, some supporters apparently believed that an admission that he had intentionally insulted Tito would render jail time inevitable; their argument thus was the only one that would keep him free of prison.<sup>34</sup> That argument would not have explained the behavior of Mihiz, Ćosić, or Stojković, however, as they were fully prepared to question Tito’s role. For them, a third explanation must be found. They—and Mihiz implicitly confirms this—believed that the *višeznačnost* argument had more potential for universal application. From the freedom of speech “flows all political freedoms,” as Mihiz put it in 1991.<sup>35</sup> However, by defending the right to say anything rather than that which was actually said, the standard set by Francuska 7 was high on principle but opened the door to the uncritical acceptance of *anything* that was said. Any speech became, by definition, valid speech.

Seven years after going off to jail, Djogo was asked how he felt answering before a court for his poetry. His answer:

I am no saint. I lived in a society which forced me, as it did others, to act as a ketman.<sup>36</sup> And no matter how much I sought an alibi in my writing or how I behaved as a man in certain circumstances, I cannot deny that I was an actor in a general theater. That which I

stirred up at that moment was nothing unusual. I was forty years old and it seemed about time to ask myself why I was alive and living as I did....I asked myself how I would redeem myself for my grandchildren, how I would convince them that I was not a criminal....I tried to reveal in verses my doubts and uncertainties, and if you like a doubtlessly contrary view of the world and the established system of values.<sup>37</sup>

Far from involving an “aesthetic misunderstanding,” as he had claimed in 1981, Djogo acknowledged that he understood exactly what he was saying in his poetry, undermining his alleged incomprehension of how anyone could read the person of Tito into his poetry. So, the government’s attack on him was never based on a “repulsive lie.” That attack may have been absurd, misplaced, and a violation of a basic human right, but it was not based on a lie. The free speech movement in Serbia was founded on the basis of a very public charade—“ketmanism” taken to its absurd conclusion. One is left only to wonder why Djogo allowed himself to be degraded so; if he really wished to redeem himself for his grandchildren, should he not have claimed credit for being the first to openly dispute Tito’s legacy? Then he might have left a “trace” worthy of Jesus, his own role model.

### BEYOND DJOGO

The death of Tito in May 1980 spurred many forms of questioning about Yugoslavia’s past, present, and future. Gojko Djogo’s aggressive yet strangely disavowed attack on Tito’s legacy was only one form that this questioning took. Between 1981 and 1984, Serbs produced some revealing and challenging literature that delved into many sacred issues of the Tito period, foremost Goli Otok. This literature included Antonije Isaković’s *Flash II*, one of the first novels in Yugoslavia to openly consider the fact of Goli Otok’s existence; Jovan Radulović’s *Pigeon Hole*, a play set in Dalmatia which dealt with communal violence during the Second World War; Dušan Jovanović’s *The Karamazovs* (Karamazovi), a story and play set during the anti-Cominformist purges; Mladen Markov’s *The Expulsion of God* (Isterivanje Boga), a novel that pulled the veil of secrecy away from the collectivization of agriculture after the Second World War; the novels

of Slobodan Selenić, including *Friends from Kosančić Venac 7* (Prijatelji sa Kosančićevog venca 7) and *Heads, Tails* (Pismo, glava); and Vuk Drašković's *The Knife*, a horrifying tale about Muslims and Serbs in Bosnia.<sup>38</sup> Also appearing in these first post-Tito years was Dobrica Ćosić's *The Real and the Possible*, a collection of essays and lectures drawn from the 1960s and 1970s, including his 1968 warning to the Fourteenth Plenum and his 1977 speech to the Serbian Academy. These books all share a common trait: they questioned one or more of the sacrosanct "truths" of the Tito regime. Many of them were enormously popular.

In response to this outpouring of historically revisionist speech, in March 1984 the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia issued a report entitled "Concerning Some Ideological and Political Tendencies in Artistic Creation, Literature, Theater and Film Criticism, and in Public Remarks of a Number of Cultural Figures in Which Were Contained Politically Unacceptable Messages."<sup>39</sup> Known to a thankful public as the *White Book*, this report profoundly frightened, insulted, and angered the Serbian intellectual community, which felt the bulk of its attack. Noting that the report reminded them of a "police dossier," the CPAF, now under Nikola Milošević's presidency, wrote that

If in some unfortunate case, ideological cleansing were to be carried out, such as is demanded in this "document," authentic artistic work would disappear here, artistic and social criticism would disappear, even humor would disappear, and the era of party-state art would begin, and the entire culture would be limited to the mere means for the spreading of politically acceptable "messages," which is to say the means of naked propaganda.<sup>40</sup>

Particularly galling to Serbs was the fact that of some 200 people mentioned in the report, 170 were Serbs. Additionally, the examples provided in the report were without exception published works, which immediately called into question their subversiveness if they had already squeezed through the censoring apparatus and had appeared in Yugoslavia's restricted public space. The fact that the majority of the critiqued figures were from Serbia also pointed out that Serbia was the most open republic in Yugoslavia and that Belgrade was producing



the most trenchant and coherent critique of the regime in the country as a whole.

Serbian questioning of Tito's legacy and the nature of Yugoslav statehood went deeper than that of other Yugoslavs. The questioning was not limited to intellectuals. Ironically, while the Serbian republican government persecuted Gojko Djogo, it also harbored the most revisionist members of any republic's hierarchy. Most importantly, the Serbian League of Communists, whose leaders included Dragoslav (Draža) Marković, Petar Stambolić, and then Ivan Stambolić, wished—as did most aware Serbs—to revise the constitutional status of Kosovo and Vojvodina. But the glazed eyes and the droning rhetoric of the Serbian leadership's mediocrities ultimately failed to inspire confidence, and as survivors of the 1972 purge and proponents of the 1974 constitution, their credibility with the critical intellectuals was shot in any case. By 1984, the Yugoslav government's dedication to its own pathetic slogan, "After Tito—Tito," had prompted it to extremes of petty harassment and persecution. While the party shrank in fear of action that might disrupt the stagnant equilibrium following Tito's death, intellectuals embraced the opportunity to shake up that equilibrium. The jailing of Djogo, the cancellation of two plays (*The Pigeon Hole* and *The Karamazovs*), various less publicized abuses—all betrayed a government which, as Djogo had predicted, was so afraid that Tito really *was* dead that it attempted to maintain the Yugoslavia that had existed before his demise. In 1983 and 1984, though, the sheer number of arrests, trials, imprisonments, and proscriptions drove the free speech movement to a new, more open stage in its development, out of the UKS and into society at large, as it were. But, importantly (and with one important exception), that movement remained chained to the UKS strategy of defending speech *per se*, without critiquing the content of that speech. This could be good and bad.

The boiling point was reached in April 1984, when Vojislav Šešelj was arrested in Sarajevo, and twenty-eight people, including Milovan Djilas, were arrested in Belgrade. Šešelj's crime was to have written a contribution to a poll in the party organ *Komunist* on the subject "What is to be Done?" That contribution was confiscated and Šešelj was arrested before the piece could be published. The twenty-eight arrestees in Belgrade were accused of engaging in enemy propaganda over a period of seven years as part of the "flying university," an

underground institution which saw different apartments hosting regular lectures on various topics, it goes without saying subversive in the eyes of the government, on a regular basis. After the initial arrests, all were set free. But then on April 30, 1984, several days after his release, Radomir Radović, one of the original twenty-eight, was found dead in his apartment. Suspicions that Radović was killed by the police fed public outrage.<sup>41</sup> On May 23, six of the original twenty-eight were rearrested and charged with counter-revolutionary activity. The death of Radović prompted a diverse group of Serbian intellectuals, including Ćosić, Popović, Mihiz, Isaković, Mihailo Marković, Matija Bećković, and others, to appeal to Stane Dolanc, the federal secretary for internal affairs, to clear up the circumstances of Radović's death or to resign his post and his position in the federal presidency, which would indicate to them that he at least understood that "a member of this highest post in our country cannot be a man who has a young human life on his conscience."<sup>42</sup> Most observers believe that the arrest and trial of the Six was intended to send a message within Yugoslavia that would not resound outside the state—thus Djilas was not jailed. The maneuver failed, however, as the trials of the Six became an important galvanizing factor in the coalescence of an active opposition to the regime.

Under these tense conditions, a new, and ultimately far more influential committee, the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression was formed in November 1984.<sup>43</sup> It was the inspiration of Dobrica Ćosić, Taras Kermauner (a Slovene), and Rudi Supek (a Croat), who envisioned a broadly Yugoslav forum that would take on causes similar to those embraced by the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom. The presence of Ćosić, in the eyes of the government the standard-bearer of Serbian nationalism, and Supek, one of the leading leftist critics of Yugoslav socialism, made this a much more high-profile undertaking. Ćosić was responsible for bringing critical Serbian intellectuals into the fold, while Kermauner and Supek would work in the Slovenian and Croatian communities. Mihiz, one of the Serbian invitees, reported later that Kermauner and Supek failed to convince their colleagues to join the Serbs: the Slovenes, Kermauner found, wished to create such a committee composed just of Slovenes, while the Croatian response was resounding silence.<sup>44</sup> The eventual members, all Serbs, included a cross-section of Belgrade's intelligentsia, with *Praxis* (Mihailo Marković, Ljubomir

Tadić), historians (Radovan Samardžić, Dimitrije Bogdanović), young but established critics (Kosta Čavoški, Ivan Janković), painters (Mića Popović, Mladen Srbinović), writers known to be hostile to the regime (Matija Bećković, Dragoslav Mihailović), veterans of the CPAF (Nikola Milošević, Predrag Palavestra, Mihiz), of course Ćosić, and five others (Neca Jovanov, Tanasije Mladenović, Gojko Nikoliš, Andrija Gams, and Dragoslav Srejskić).<sup>45</sup> They would meet in Popović's atelier in the Serbian Academy, to which he had moved from the sajmište some years before.<sup>46</sup> Ćosić envisioned it as a continuation of the board he composed for the Serbian Literary Guild in 1970: "a pluralistic forum of the Serbian intelligentsia, composed of people of the most contrasting beliefs and opposed ideological views," which would "unite the struggle for the integrity of Serbian culture in Tito's Yugoslavia..."<sup>47</sup>

In their initial declaration, the committee noted that "trials of human thought, not only the 'verbal delikt' but also the censoring of manuscripts, [which are] ever more common in our country, [are] becoming an ideologically and legally legitimate method of political reckoning for the government with those who disagree with it." Noting particularly the case of the Belgrade Six and Vojislav Šešelj and the application of the notion of moral-political suitability in the workplace, they proclaimed that

freedom of thought and expression are not the possession, gift, or privilege of any class, social group, party, or power of state; that freedom and that right belong to all human beings, and their fulfillment or endangerment are the business of the wisdom and conscience of all of the citizens of the social community. On that assumption, the Committee for the Freedom of Thought and Expression is organized.<sup>48</sup>

The committee would operate through 1989, but its effect was minimal, even in the view of the notoriously self-congratulatory Ćosić: "No matter how much the petitions reflected honorable democratic resistance to the autocratic and bureaucratic regime, their political meaning was small."<sup>49</sup>

The cases of the Belgrade Six and Šešelj acted as others in a line—a line that would grow longer with each passing month—of sym-

bolic opportunities to frame a particular type of opposition discourse in Serbia; the substance of their cases was radically different, but the principle on the basis of which they were defended was identical in each case: the freedom of speech and thought. But how did such a mixed bag of regime critics ever join a unified opposition? A partial answer would be that Ćosić, for all of his differences with the *Praxis* crowd, continued to see himself as a dedicated leftist. He had a long history of collaboration with *Praxis* itself. And by the mid-1980s, he could bring some of the fiercer non-communist critics, including Mihiz and Popović, into such an enterprise. Čavoški was developing a powerful reputation for principled opposition to the regime, especially drawing attention in his writings to the government's sweeping application of constitutional provisions against the *verbalni delikt*, so his presence on the Committee was not remarkable. For Palavestra, Milošević, Mihailović, and Mihiz, the new committee was a natural continuation of the old CPAF (which still existed, chaired now by Milošević in a dual role). So there was a practical logic to the joining of these forces. But plainly these men, of varied ideological and personal backgrounds, pooled their talents because they believed that the defense of the freedom of speech was the single foundation upon which a unified opposition, and thence political freedom, could be attained. It was the only platform they could share.

But again, as with the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom, having denied themselves the freedom to debate the ideological and practical content of those causes they chose to adopt, members of this new committee in essence blessed any persecuted idea, regardless its meaning. Laudably, this usually included the ideas of non-Serbs, some of which were contentious from a Serbian viewpoint. The committee defended the speech of, and protested the arrest of, anyone who was tried on the basis of article 133. Thus the two committees would not only tackle Serbian causes, but would also condemn the persecution of Bosnian Muslims like Alija Izetbegović, Albanian nationalists like Adem Demaci, and assorted others, especially in Croatia and Slovenia.<sup>50</sup> In hindsight, one of the most interesting causes came in 1987, when the CDFTE produced an appeal to the presidencies of Yugoslavia and of Bosnia and Hercegovina protesting the continued incarceration of Izetbegović, one of the authors of the "Islamic Declaration," who had been jailed in 1983 along with

five other Bosnian Muslims. The committee complained that the punishment (nine years for Izetbegović) was draconian, incomprehensible, and pointless, but

is nonetheless less absurd than the reasons for which Izetbegović was convicted. He was held responsible for the “Islamic Declaration,” which he wrote as far back as 1970, and which for an entire thirteen years provoked no suspicions within the organs of persecution, only to be certified in 1983 as a counter-revolutionary attack on the state and societal order of Yugoslavia. It presents a vision of contemporary humanistic and tolerant Islam, represents the principle of equality of all people and the freedom of conscience, critiques the totalitarian framework of power and the cult of personality, rejects the principle that “the ends justify the means,” and contests the role of conservative hodžas and sheiks.<sup>51</sup>

For those who are aware of the use to which the “Islamic Declaration” was put by Serbs during the Bosnian war, it is a rather striking example of just how much viewpoints can change, especially in the service of state propaganda.

Another example would be the continued incarceration of Adem Demaci, an Albanian nationalist writer who was imprisoned in 1963, and whose situation was addressed by the CDFTE, but whose ideas were dealt with differently. In 1986, when the CDFTE took up Demaci’s cause, he had been in jail for 23 years. In this case, the committee was careful to distance itself from his “extreme” ideas: “We believe however that a principle is in question. If a writer is convicted just because of that which he thought, spoke, or wrote, it is the duty of this Committee to react.”<sup>52</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to note that in the case of Šešelj, none of the protests from either of the committees or other individuals ever critiqued his essays, which called for the unity of Serbia and Montenegro and warned of the threat of militant Islam to Serbs in Bosnia; they were inflammatory, but their message was palatable to the average Serb. But, even so, the more general point is that the public campaign against the application of article 133 of the Yugoslav constitution was to the credit of the Serbian intellectual community in the 1980s.

## FROM PRINCIPLE TO CATHARSIS, VIA KOSOVO

At the point when Serbs' euphoria over their rediscovered voice was born, a new issue burst into their consciousness, an issue that had been kept out of the public sphere for decades and was thus another example of alleged government mendacity. In March of 1981, Kosovo's Albanian population erupted in a nationalistic rebellion. In the aftermath, the Serbian and Yugoslav Leagues of Communists admitted that the Kosovo party had fostered the growth of nationalism and separatism in the region. Therefore, Serbian intellectuals easily captured Kosovo within the rhetorical frame established by the movement for freedom of expression—if the truth about Kosovo had been known but suppressed, then speaking out about it must be good and, by definition, democratic. Alas, as the 1980s progressed, Kosovo would be the source of outrageous flights of rhetorical fancy among Serbs and the site of the growth of an aggressive and xenophobic Serbian nationalistic movement. Thus a paradox arose: while Serbs insisted that their opposition to communism was, and would remain, principled and democratic, to most outsiders that opposition appeared to be the opposite—irrational and intolerant. Just as Gojko Djogo's poetry was defended as such and not according to its content, so would speech—any speech—about Kosovo be defended. Kosovo therefore came to link two sources of the Serbian national revival of the 1980s: the initial, reasoned and cerebral free-speech movement, and the later, cathartic and visceral movement of rage over the fate of Serbs in Tito's Yugoslavia.

The cathartic nature of Kosovo's role in the Serbian consciousness became clear after May 1, 1985. On that day, a Serbian farmer named Djordje Martinović was found bleeding in his field near the town of Gnjilane in Kosovo, a bottle shoved into his rectum.<sup>53</sup> Medical and police authorities were unable to reach a consensus regarding how Martinović received his injuries: for some this was an obvious case of masturbation gone awry, while for others Martinović was the clear victim of aggression by Albanians. During the weeks following the painful episode, these opposing interpretations took form. Serbs became convinced that Martinović was the victim of a political crime whose perpetrators wished to scare Serbs into leaving Kosovo. For them, Martinović had suffered the legendary Ottoman torture of impalement,

signifying the revisitation of the entire Ottoman "occupation" and its horrible consequences for Serbia. The fact that this "truthful" rendition of the event was not immediately revealed by authorities provoked Serbian paranoia. Any official denial of the Serbian thesis worked its way into the Serbian syndrome of fear and suspicion, convincing Serbs ever more solidly that the state was in cahoots with Albanian separatists, as many believed it had been in 1981. The event itself was far less important than the affair that it provoked, as Martinović quickly entered the lexicon of Serbian martyrs and heroes from Kosovo. Nothing about the nature of the injuries that Djordje Martinović suffered has been settled by the uproar that attended them, but then the man's private tragedy turned out to be secondary to the larger political, even mythical, significance of the "affair" to which it gave birth.

Because the state never adequately explained what happened to Martinović, the door opened for mythologists of all stripes. Circumstances conspired to render truth and myth equally satisfying. The fact that Martinović was injured in Kosovo likely meant that Albanian doctors and police would examine him and determine the nature of his injuries. The first Serbian press reports of the attack were hardly dispassionate: "two unidentified persons committed a true massacre."<sup>54</sup> And journalists immediately ascertained a convincing motive from Martinović's family: Albanians had expressed interest in buying the family land, but the Martinovičs refused to sell. The event became "...another of the pressures on Serbs and Montenegrins to emigrate from Kosovo."<sup>55</sup> Initially the doctors and political authorities in Kosovo agreed that Martinović was attacked by others, but then, a week into the investigation, the papers reported that doctors and police, after investigating the wounds Martinović received and the site of the alleged attack, had concluded that Martinović had injured himself. And, Martinović allegedly admitted to a Serbian colonel in the Yugoslav Peoples' Army that he injured himself masturbating. Martinović was then transferred to the War Medicine Academy in Belgrade, the Serbian republican ministry of the interior took over the investigation on May 11, and no official statement was issued for weeks. That left the issue to be debated in the press and in cafes. "This unfortunate method of public circulation of information and announcements on this tragic event has born unexpected fruit: instead of seeking the truth...people have begun to opt for either this or that

piece of information, for this or that announcement.”<sup>56</sup> Suffice it to say that within a couple of weeks, two “sides” had emerged, sides whose loyalty to one explanation or the other would not change. Because the government left the field open to competing scandalmongers, an accurate, accepted rendition of the case would never emerge. In such a situation, the Truth became something wholly relative.

Dobrica Ćosić appealed to higher authorities to find and publicize the truth of the matter. His letter of May 13, 1985, sent to Dušan Ćkrebić, the president of the presidency of the Serbian League of Communists and to Branko Mamula, the federal minister of defense, read as follows:

You can make the truth known, with your authority, a truth with which one can, at least a bit, contribute to the calming of the general bitterness and the sense of civil and national depression that has seized all honorable people in our country...Know this: with the truth about Martinović, which needs to be transmitted to the people as soon as possible, the truth at all costs, we can save the remainder of our self-respect and dignity before the world. With that truth, you fulfill the pledge which you gave when accepting responsible and honorable duty which you execute. Do not allow political blind men, provocateurs, and chauvinist hypocrites to push us ever deeper into interethnic hatred, into an even more severe political and moral dead-end.<sup>57</sup>

Even as he demanded that the authorities learn and publicize the truth about Martinović, Ćosić had already determined in his heart that the truth was that Martinović had been attacked.

The Serbian Writers’ Association now stepped once again into the role it had adopted in 1982, pressing Yugoslavia’s governors to take action in the Martinović affair. On June 16, 1985, the assembly of the association composed two documents: one a letter to the Serbian republican skupština, the other a general statement entitled “The Positions of the Delegate Assembly of the UKS on the Occasion of the Situation in the SAP Kosovo.”<sup>58</sup> The first called upon the Serbian skupština to form a special commission to examine the Martinović episode. It noted that the public explanation—that Martinović had harmed himself—could not be supported by the facts: “The injuries in



question were accomplished with the broad [!] and not the narrow end of the bottle, in the light of day and in a place where a person could be seen from a distance of greater than three hundred meters.” Because of the dissonance between the facts and the public pronouncements, the situation “remains unresolved and as such open to manipulations of all sorts.” According to the UKS, a commission of the skupština would be the only constitutional means to ascertain the truth.<sup>59</sup>

The UKS did not view the Martinović affair as isolated: it asserted that it was symptomatic of the situation in Kosovo. Zoran Gluščević asserted that “the affair is leading (or clearing the way) to the fracturing and breakup of our country.”<sup>60</sup> He believed that the UKS should stand on the position that the episode concerned the “situation and atmosphere which governs Kosovo.” Serbian writers, Gluščević said, should follow the lead of French writers during the Dreyfus affair (“an incomparably less drastic business”), when they acted “in the name of a human and existential, metaphysical point of view...”<sup>61</sup> The June 1985 “Positions” of the UKS emphasized the danger that the situation in Kosovo posed to the entire Yugoslav state: “Irredentist savagery, systematic violence known only in barbarian societies...imposes maximal damage to collective international relations in the SFRJ, and, by the same token, will have unforeseeable results for the democratic political future of Yugoslavia.”<sup>62</sup> They called for other artistic organizations in other republics and provinces to respond “in such a way that it shows that these dimensions of Yugoslavia’s current fate concern them as well as us.”<sup>63</sup> The “Positions” then demanded that those responsible for Albanian nationalist movement in Kosovo be fired from their positions.

Kosovo became the Serbian national obsession; 1985 is as good a year as any to identify as the turning point. The Martinović episode and the petition movement opened the public, cathartic phase of a movement devoted to “truth” in which Kosovo dominated the Serbian psyche. The notorious Memorandum did not become public until late 1986, but it was conceived just after the Martinović nightmare began. From that point, the Serbian press began ever more to focus attention on Kosovo: reports of rape, kidnapping, forcible sales of land, murder (all by Albanians, against Serbs) appeared more and more often. One early but typical article by Milisav Savić, a Serbian writer, appeared in September 1985 in *Književne novine*. Entitled “Notes from Kosovo,” it

was framed as a travelogue. Savić visited Danica Milinčić, whose son had been murdered as she watched three years before in the village of Samodreža: "I do not wish to get into the motives for all murders, but regarding [that of Danilo Milinčić] it is said that it was done with the intent to drive the Milinčić family from their holdings..." Savić also relates the story of two friends, one Albanian and one Serb. The Albanian contrived to drive down the price of the Serb's land, and when the Serb would not sell, had his friend beaten. Relating the stories of raped children, families forced from their own land, and murdered Serbs, Savić concludes that there is but one solution: openness, public discussion, and the rule of law, for currently, the law did not apply to Serbs and a conspiracy of silence dominated the public. Savić also invited his non-Serbian writer colleagues (including by name Abdullah Sidran, Taras Kermauner, and Predrag Matvejević) to visit Kosovo to see for themselves.<sup>64</sup> What moved Kosovo from national concern to national obsession? When Djordje Martinović was elevated to the status of national martyr instead of, for instance, remaining the individual victim of a horrifying act; when the Serbian Writers' Association declared the Martinović episode to be reflective of the general situation in Kosovo instead of an exceptional event; and when the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy proclaimed that a state of "total war" had existed in Kosovo since 1981, something more than mere hyperbole was at work. Instead, Serbian society—or, those Serbs who partook of this obsession—had concluded that the essence of Serbianness was to be the object of other people's depredations.

The linkage of free speech and openness with Kosovo received another stimulus in October 1985, when over 2,000 Serbs from Kosovo presented a petition to various governmental bodies.<sup>65</sup> The designers of the petition produced an aggressive, challenging document, which they sent to the presidencies, assemblies, governments, and central committees of the Serbian and Yugoslav parties and state governments, as well as to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Serbian Writers' Association, four individuals, and a few other institutions in Yugoslavia. One suspects that the forcefulness of the petition might have come as a shock to the Serbian and Yugoslav public consciousness, were it not for the Martinović episode that was barely five months old. This petition gave more formal structure to the fears engendered by the Martinović incident:

Exposed to violence unheard of in history...we the undersigned Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija undertake our final effort to protect our families' right to life using legal means...The situation is in reality stunning: a part of Yugoslavia is occupied, the region of our historical and national essence, and genocide by fascists against us Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija has achieved the status of a civil right.

Two elements of this initial section of the petition would become the ritualized basis for Serbian grievances regarding Kosovo: that Kosovo was the core of Serbs' historical "essence," and that the law of this Yugoslavia was—inexcusably and unjustly—on the side of the Albanians, who were committing genocide against the Serbian population.<sup>66</sup> The petition finished off with fourteen demands, including: that Serbia be given the same status as the other republics of Yugoslavia (that is, that it be unified and the autonomous provinces eliminated); that the names of those responsible for the genocide of Serbs be publicly announced; that no more Albanians be allowed to immigrate from Albania; that all sales agreements of Serbian property to Albanians be nullified; that Serbian families be enabled to return to Kosovo; that Ballists (Albanian nationalists from World War II) be rooted out; that the ethnic key be eliminated in determining employment in the province; and that the parliament of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia be convened, with the petition's signatories present, to answer this petition by October 30, 1985.

When the federal and republican governments refused to consider the demands of the petitioners in the parliament and labeled them counter-revolutionaries, the transformation of Kosovo into the central grievance of the movement for free expression was complete. In January 1986, over two hundred influential Serbs forwarded a second petition to the federal parliament, demanding nothing specific of that body but announcing their hope that the Yugoslav public would rise in opposition to the government's collaboration in genocide, by Albanians, of Serbs in Kosovo.<sup>67</sup> As the work of Serbia's intellectual elite, this document included much more florid language than the October petition:

The methods [of persecution of Serbs] have remained the same: on old stakes there are again heads. The new Deacon Avakum

is named Djordje Martinović, and the Mother of the Jugovićes is Danica Milinčić.<sup>68</sup> Old women and nuns are raped, the feeble are beaten, cattle are blinded, stalls are built of grave stones, the church and its historic holy places are profaned and shamed, economic sabotage is tolerated, people are forced to sell their property for nothing...<sup>69</sup>

Aside from extravagant claims expressed in lavish prose, the petitioners pointed out the duplicity of the government. "In 1981," the petition continued, "it was publicly acknowledged that the true situation in Kosovo had been hidden and falsified; the hope was stoked that it would not happen again. For five years already we have witnessed uninterrupted anarchy and the collapse of hope that social and national relations in Kosovo and Metohija could be changed." For these petitioners, the competition for Kosovo became a competition between public truths and governmental deception. The refusal of the government to receive the earlier Kosovo Serb petitioners became an attack on their right to speak. By cloaking the truth, the authorities became complicit in genocide, and thus did the movement for free expression come to focus primarily on Kosovo.

This second petition was signed by representatives of virtually all possible factions within the Serbian critical intelligentsia. Signatories included Dobrica Ćosić, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Mića Popović, Vera Božićković-Popović, Vojislav Djurić, Mihailo Djurić, Bata Mihailović, and Žika Stojković of the *siminovci*; Ljubomir Tadić, Mihailo Marković, and Zagorka Golubović-Pešić of the *Praxis* group; over 30 members of the Serbian academy; a number of retired military officers; several priests; and dozens of others. Particularly surprising were the contingent from *Praxis*, who were called to answer for their signatures on what appeared to be an outlandish petition based on a mystical understanding of historical processes, rather than the dispassionate socio-economic analysis that might have been expected of them.<sup>70</sup> To one commentator's attack on them for signing on to Serbian nationalism, they responded that (a) there was nothing inconsistent in their support for an oppressed minority, be it Serbian or of some other nationality, and (b) that "all three of us are members of the *Committee for the defense of freedom of public expression* in Belgrade and raise our voices against all forms of repression in our country."<sup>71</sup>

Their justification for their signatures was telling: Kosovo turns into just another occasion for the defense of freedom of expression, and the fight for the freedom of expression validates any interpretation of the roots of the crisis in Kosovo. Speech repressed became, by definition, good speech. The merging of two strands of opposition: the legalistic, reasoned, cerebral support for free expression, and the mystical, cathartic, visceral support for the Serbian minority in Kosovo, was now complete; they may have been intuitively incompatible, but in the progression of Serbian thought in the 1980s they were fully complementary.

### THE MEMORANDUM OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY

The two strands merged most clearly in 1985, when Ćosić initiated another attempt at a more formal return to engagement, akin to his sponsorship of *Žavnost* in 1980. The call to formal intellectual involvement (as opposed to the relatively chaotic petition campaign of the committees and unorganized intellectual groupings) embodied in the *Žavnost* letter of October 1980 remained unanswered amid all of the prevarication and apparent disinterest of the regime. But in May 1984, Ćosić gave a speech to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts upon passage of the Academy's yearly report. He noted that contrary to the report's spirit of normality, in his view an "irregular situation" prevailed in Yugoslav society. In those conditions, "it would be good to think about the activities and responsibilities of the Academy now and in the future." Describing in familiar detail a Yugoslavia that was in "the deepest and most all-encompassing systemic crisis since its appearance," he reiterated his belief that there was "unexploited and critically underdeveloped scholarly potential" in the country. Yugoslav society "does not have, and no one is creating" the "existential consciousness" necessary to dig itself out of its hole. The Yugoslavs were wasting time:

Are we doing our duty in the Academy, if along with being occupied with our specialties, we do not concern ourselves with general social and contemporary problematics, if we do not more powerfully spread critical thought, intellectual skepticism, moral courage and knowledge, and testimony to the truth about society and the world

in which we live? Should the Academy work harder and talk louder in engagement on contemporary social and national problems.... Can the Academy mean and emanate something more than, and rise above, both political and cultural traditions of our soil and its conformist inertia?

"I believe," Ćosić proclaimed, "that the knowledge which the Academy possesses should not remain a matter of specialties, but should be integrated with wisdom, general experience, and collective strategic vision, and be offered to society. Offered energetically and argumentatively." This call would be answered with the now-infamous "Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts."<sup>72</sup>

On May 23, 1985, just after the Martinović episode and several months before the petitions of the Kosovo Serbs and the Belgrade intellectual elite were sent to the Federal Parliament, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts met in general session and decided to produce a document outlining the problems Yugoslavia faced. The academy apparently debated long and hard over whether it should assemble such a document in the first place, since its bylaws required it to remain out of politics. But the general assembly of the academy ultimately agreed that Yugoslavia's crisis demanded contributions from all of those resources at Yugoslavia's disposal. "No one has the right to shut his eyes to what is happening and to what might happen," said the assembly. "And this particularly holds true for the most venerable institution of scientific and cultural achievement of this nation."<sup>73</sup> The document would then be sent to the various governing bodies of the state. On June 13, 1985, the presidency of the Academy appointed a committee to prepare the outline. The committee consisted of Pavle Ivić, Antonije Isaković, Dušan Kanazir, Mihailo Marković, Miloš Macura, Dejan Medaković, Miroslav Pantić, Nikola Pantić, Ljubiša Rakić, Radovan Samardžić, Miomir Vukobratović, Vasilije Krestić, Ivan Maksimović, Kosta Mihailović, Stojan Ćelić, and Nikola Čobeljić.<sup>74</sup> Four other academics were added to the committee in March 1986. Ivić and Medaković (an art historian) were siminovci; Marković was a leader of the *Praxis* group; Isaković a fiction writer who had been close to the siminovci; Samardžić and Krestić were leading historians; Mihailović was Serbia's best-known economist; Ćelić was a painter. Members of the committee wrote those sections

that fell within their expertise. When a draft of a section was completed, Isaković (the vice-president of the academy and the informal chair of the committee) would convene meetings which several additional academicians, including Dobrica Ćosić and Ljubomir Tadić, attended. By January 1986, the first full draft of the memorandum was prepared. In late September, after several months of editing, as the document neared completion, the Belgrade newspaper *Večernje novosti* revealed that the Academy was preparing it.<sup>75</sup> From that point, it was known as the Memorandum.

This synopsis of the origins of the Memorandum is included because it clarifies some areas of real and alleged confusion regarding the document. First, it was not prepared secretly. The Academy had acknowledged that it was working on such a project. Second, it was not written by Dobrica Ćosić, although he has long been credited with authorship by non-Serbian commentators and he had promoted such a project. Unquestionably, his ideas did find their way into the document. Third, it was not completed. This point, repeated ad nauseum by the Academy, its members, and supporters, is accurate but ultimately beside the point, for none of the document's authors or admirers have ever disavowed its contents. Nevertheless, the Memorandum, unfinished (and until 1989 unpublished<sup>76</sup>), entered the realm of public and political discourse in September 1986. It also entered the realm of the mythology accompanying the collapse of Yugoslavia.

The Memorandum is formally divided into two parts: one on "the Crisis in the Yugoslav Economy and Society," the other on "the Status of Serbia and the Serbian Nation." That first portion, however, can be further broken down for the sake of clarity into three subsections: one on the economy, one which considers Yugoslavia's constitutional order, and a third which treats cultural questions. With particular regard for the economic crisis, which would take up much of the Memorandum, the committee wrote that "a particular cause for anxiety is that official political circles are unwilling to acknowledge the true reasons for the economic crisis, making it impossible to take the steps necessary for economic recovery."<sup>77</sup> One perceives a rebuke: the party had failed in its task, and now those who really understood the situation had to step forth, in the same spirit that would compel the petitioners of January 1986 to do so. Aside from that, the Memorandum noted the party's unwillingness to "acknowledge" the truth. The

Memorandum's complaints can be reduced to one fundamental problem as the committee saw it: the confederalization of Yugoslavia, as enshrined in the 1974 constitution, whose antecedents it traced to the early 1960s and which unfairly penalized Serbs. Underlying the great mistake of 1974 was an attitude that was born in the international communist movement: "the roots lie in the ideology propagated by the Comintern and in the CPY's national policy before the Second World War."<sup>78</sup>

Economically, the Memorandum states, "the system of planning was disrupted" by the reforms leading to the constitution of 1974. "With the abolition of planning, the coordinating function of the federal government withered away, while the impeding of market forces stifled economic initiative." Instead, "decentralization...degenerated into disintegration along territorial lines...eight economic areas were created, with the national economies as their ideological base."<sup>79</sup> The progress of self-management, which the Memorandum's authors saw as a positive "substitution" for government, was disrupted, with regional, republican governments stepping in to pervert it. "Self-management is mere window dressing and not the pillar of society...There is no real plan, no real market, no real government, and no real self-management."<sup>80</sup> The idea of self-management, the document asserts, "which pivots on the dis-alienation of politics, was replaced with the idea of decentralization, which led to the setting up of regional centres of alienated power."<sup>81</sup>

The constitution of 1974 then comes under direct attack in the Memorandum. The "confederation" which resulted from the constitution allowed for republican vetoes of federal legislation; it "opened the doors wide to the promotion of local interests at the expense of national interests"; "ethnic interests have taken precedence over class interests, and the provinces have insisted more on their status as a constituent element of the federation than on the fact that they are an integral part of Serbia."<sup>82</sup> The solution to this problem was

a democratic, integrating federalism, in which the principle of autonomy of the parts is in harmony with the principle of coordinating the parts within the framework of a single whole, in which political institutions at all levels of society are set up in a consistently democratic way, in which decision-making is preceded by



free, rational, and public debate, and not by secret behind-the-scenes maneuvering by cabals of self-styled and self-appointed champions of special ethnic interests.<sup>83</sup>

If “democratization” was the solution, the Academy deemed the LCY incapable of such a process: the party had “become privatized.” The “revolutionary movement...changed into a party of vested interests.”<sup>84</sup>

The Memorandum then asserted that a moral crisis pervaded Yugoslav society, whose roots could be found in the failure of ideology, “by a discrepancy between word and deed on the part of the political leadership...by moral conformism and reward of careerism...in short, by a lack of democratic public opinion which would act as the effective conscience of society.” The committee saw evidence of this moral crisis in unemployment, lack of initiative in the workplace, and the “small-minded peasant mentality, made worse by...a penchant for focusing on immediate interests in the here and now...”<sup>85</sup> “The general public,” the document continues, “lacks a clear sense of civic duty, of working towards and sacrificing oneself for general social goals.”

This psychology, linked with an untrammelled primitivism, has greatly strengthened the propensity towards kitsch in literature, music, film, and entertainment of all types...genuine cultural values have failed to take root on a large scale in society, despite the large number of important accomplishments in Yugoslavia’s cultural life.<sup>86</sup>

The confederalization of Yugoslavia had more general cultural consequences:

Cultural life is becoming more and more regionalized; the Yugoslav and universal significance of culture is becoming obliterated, and in large part it is putting itself in the service of republican and provincial aspirations to carve out their own fiefdoms in this sphere as well. The overall provincialism of cultural life lowers standards and makes it possible for the less talented to gain wide public recognition. Deep-rooted as they are in provincial cultural life, separatism and nationalism are becoming increasingly aggressive.<sup>87</sup>

In these words, one senses Ćosić's inspiration. His own proclamations on the role of culture in socialism rang with the same sort of open-ended rhetoric. The sentiments could easily have been found in one of Ćosić's speeches or essays from the 1964/65 debate on Yugoslav writers, in which he argued for the creation of one, universal, Yugoslav culture.

The second half of the Memorandum is the part that is most often quoted, for it includes the most inflammatory language and tenuous claims. Entitled "The Status of Serbia and the Serbian Nation," it foreshadowed many of the themes that would come to dominate Serbian political and intellectual discourse in coming years, during which, among other things, "genocide" became an extremely mobile concept in Serbia. This section first identifies the three processes that the committee felt needed to be discussed: the "long-term lagging" of the Serbian economy; "unregulated legal relations with Yugoslavia and the provinces"; and "the genocide in Kosovo."<sup>88</sup>

In this section, the committee identified the fundamental basis for Serbia's poor position in Yugoslavia as the Communist International's identification of Serbia with hegemony in interwar Yugoslavia. This identification, the committee believed, had both economic and political results, all bad for Serbia. The communist party's assertion that Serbia had dominated the interwar economy of Yugoslavia was never tested, but rather simply accepted. Thus, the Serbian people were subjected to "a feeling of historical guilt in the hope of weakening their opposition to the political and economic subordination to which they were consistently subjected." Serbian leaders "did not have the initiative in a single key issue having to do with the political and economic system" because of the assumed hegemony of Serbia in interwar Yugoslavia.<sup>89</sup> The Memorandum attributes this situation to the "inviolable authority" of Tito and Edvard Kardelj.<sup>90</sup> Due to this interwar inheritance, the CPY refused to endorse the formation of a Communist Party of Serbia until after the war, which meant that Serbia was under-represented in AVNOJ, which decided Yugoslavia's postwar territorial and social order.<sup>91</sup> The result: "Yugoslavia appears not as a community of equal citizens or equal nations and nationalities but rather as a community of eight equal territories. And yet not even here is Serbia equal, because of its special legal and political status, which reflects the desire to keep the Serbian people constantly under control."<sup>92</sup> The 1974

Constitution was nothing but the end result of the application of bolshevik assumptions about Serbia.

While much of the Memorandum retains a scholarly—or at least analytical—tone, the portions concerning Serbia's relations with its autonomous provinces, and the life of Serbs in those provinces, are quite extravagant. The Memorandum initiates its discussion of these topics by pronouncing them existential, rather than constitutional, issues.

The relationships between Serbia and its provinces cannot be seen solely or even predominantly in terms of an interpretation of the two constitutions from a legal standpoint. The question concerns the Serbian nation and its state. A nation which after a long and bloody struggle regained its own state, which fought for and achieved a civil democracy, and which in the last two wars lost 2.5 million of its members, has lived to see the day when a Party committee of apparatchiks decrees that after four decades in the new Yugoslavia it alone is not allowed to have its own state. A worse historical defeat in peacetime cannot be imagined.<sup>93</sup>

Serbia's relationship to its provinces is thus removed from the realm of administrative efficiency and legal consistency and raised to the level of a question of historical justice, as the Memorandum itself moves from the cerebral to the visceral.

With regard to Kosovo, the Memorandum states that "in the spring of 1981, open and total war was declared on the Serbian people."<sup>94</sup> That war, which brought "the physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide of the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija," had now continued for five years. Fantastically, even stunningly, given the recent return of 1915 to the Serbian conscience, the authors of the Memorandum claimed that Kosovo was "worse than any defeat experienced in the liberation wars waged by Serbia from the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 to the uprising in 1941." The fault for it lies at the doorstep of Serbian communists, who "are always on the defensive and always worried more about what others think of them and their timid overtures at raising the issue of Serbia's status than about the objective facts affecting the future of the nation which they lead."<sup>95</sup> Those Serbian communists had also "hushed up" and "glossed over" the

crimes of Albanians in Kosovo, resulting in “a false, ‘sanitized’ picture of conditions in Kosovo.” The committee used the Martinović case (“reminiscent of the darkest days of the Turkish practice of impalement”) as an example of “the stubborn refusal to let a court of law determine and acknowledge the truth.”<sup>96</sup> The document then records what had become a common litany of grievances of Serbs in Kosovo: that their cultural heritage was being destroyed, that they were being forced to emigrate, that although “they are living in the cradle of the Serbs’ historical existence,” they were second-class citizens.<sup>97</sup> Croatia then comes into the line of fire of the Academy: “Except for the time under the Independent State of Croatia, the Serbs in Croatia have never before been as jeopardized as they are today.”<sup>98</sup> Vojvodina does not escape scrutiny: “The political leaders of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina are not trying to promote togetherness; instead, they are seeking greater independence and secession from the Republic of Serbia.”<sup>99</sup>

Finally, the Academy attacks the atomization of Serbian culture, according to which “children are taught that Njegoš is not a Serbian writer” and “the Serbian cultural and spiritual heritage is made out to be less than it really is, and the Serbian people are thus denied access to an important fountainhead of their moral and historical identity.”<sup>100</sup> To this discussion of the denigration of Serbia’s cultural contributions, the Memorandum closed with a call for cultural and political rejuvenation and reawakening that is the most important passage in the document. It merits a long extract:

The establishment of the Serbian people’s complete national and cultural integrity, regardless of which republic or province they might be living in, is their historical and democratic right. The acquisition of equal rights and an independent development for the Serbian nation have a more profound historical significance. In less than fifty years, for two successive generations, the Serbs were twice subjected to physical annihilation, forced assimilation, conversion to a different religion, cultural genocide, ideological indoctrination, denigration and compulsion to renounce their own traditions because of an imposed guilt complex. Intellectually and political [sic] unmanned, the Serbian nation has had to bear trials and tribulations that are too severe not to leave deep scars in their

psyche, and at the close of this century of great technological feats of the human mind, this fact must not be ignored. If they want to have a future in the family of cultured and civilized nations of the world, the Serbian people must be allowed to find themselves again and become an historical personality in their own right, to regain a sense of their historical and spiritual being, to make a clear assessment of their economic and cultural interests, to devise a modern social and national programme which will inspire present generations and generations to come.<sup>101</sup>

This remarkable passage, virtually demanding a national renaissance, indicates that the narrowed path that Ćosić had followed since 1968 had become the choice of much of Serbia's intellectual elite. Just as Ćosić had moved from a universalist position of support for an amorphous new Yugoslav identity to a restrictive Serbianness, now the (unofficial, unfinished, unpublished) Memorandum of the Serbian Academy followed suit. This call for Serbs to "find themselves again" and "devise a modern social and national programme" amounts to a call for national consolidation and renewal. Having exhausted themselves in the search for a completely new identity that would drown particular national identities, they now gave in to, and even embraced, their own particular national identity.<sup>102</sup>

At the time of the Memorandum affair (late 1986), many in Serbia suspected that Ćosić had been the author of the document. That suspicion gradually became accepted wisdom by non-Serbian commentators thereafter. However, Ćosić has denied any active role in the formulation of the Memorandum, and we should take his word for that. He says that he sat in on sessions in which the Memorandum was to be edited; one journalist claims to have seen sixteen pages of amendments that Ćosić had prepared.<sup>103</sup> Since Ćosić saw nothing shameful in the Memorandum, there is no reason to assume that he would have hidden his responsibility. And, the Memorandum itself is obviously an amalgam of contributions from various people, and many of those contributions are fairly easy to identify. For instance, Vasilije Krestić, a historian of the Serbs of the Habsburg Monarchy, surely prepared the sections on Croatia; the ideas of Kosta Mihailović, an economist active since the early 1960s, are readily apparent in those sections concerning the economy; and the various commentaries on self-management and

the alienating function of government seem likely to have come from the pen of Mihailo Marković. Certainly the thoughts of Ćosić found their way into the Memorandum, but that fact reflects more his general influence rather than his direct participation in the Memorandum's creation.

On December 18, 1986, Ćosić spoke at an extraordinary meeting of the Serbian Academy, called to discuss the public response to the Memorandum and, more specifically, governmental demands that those academics who were responsible for the document be condemned publicly for their actions (Isaković, as day-to-day manager of the group, was identified as the main culprit). The thrust of Ćosić's commentary was that in forming a commission to compile a memorandum, the academy had "confirmed its readiness to...collaborate with responsible social factors and the entire creative intelligentsia" in helping Yugoslavia "emerge from the difficult temptations in which it finds itself."<sup>104</sup> Publicly condemned, subjected to a campaign of public censure, the academy and its members were once again reminded just how little intellectuals were valued in Serbia and Yugoslavia:

That campaign against the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts revealed the political hypocrisy of government towards the creative intelligentsia of this society and disclosed its actual social position: powerlessness and subordination. And that by no means occurred by accident or coincidentally. It was the logical act of a tireless and disastrous policy in this country, which proclaims truth to be Serbian nationalism and an enemy act.<sup>105</sup>

How, Ćosić asked, could the academy be accused of nationalism when it had only addressed problems that the rest of Yugoslav society wished to avoid? He enumerated those problems, which included: "general existential crisis," "the appearance of a second Albanian state on Serbian and Yugoslav territory," "bureaucratic feudalism in Vojvodina and Albanian separatism in Kosovo" which had become factors in "the destruction of the national and social integrity, historical and spiritual essence of Serbia," "moral and spiritual crisis of the entire society," "general developmental collapse of Yugoslavia to the floor of European civilization" and many others—all of which had found their way into the Memorandum itself.<sup>106</sup> Thus, Ćosić and likely most of the Serbian intel-

lectual elite missed the point: the problem was less that the academy had produced a memorandum, than that the academy produced a memorandum which said what it said. The Memorandum was the Serbian intellectual's antidote to 1974: outside, expert voices would be heard; alas, they were heard in a spirit of catharsis rather than deliberation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter has been to trace the development of a renewed Serbian movement for intellectual engagement following the death of Tito in May 1980. I have been less concerned here with examining the intellectual development of the nonconformists than I have with merely establishing when, where, and how they were participants in this movement. The most important single point to be drawn from this chapter concerns the disturbing transition in the movement from a pure—perhaps overly pure—emphasis on the principle of free expression to a cathartic embrace of Kosovo as a reflection of all of the ills faced by Serbia and even Yugoslavia. The key to that transition can easily be found in the very nature of the origins of the free expression movement: that movement treated speech and artistic expression as not merely rights to be exercised, but nearly sacred obligations that somehow transcended the necessity for criticism. Thus, Gojko Djogo had the right to say what he wished, but nobody reminded his supporters that they had the duty to criticize his poetry's content. Kosovo slid into that pre-existing framework, and a Serbian intellectual elite, prepped to promote and defend any speech at all, resisted attempts to criticize that speech. Of course, their disinclination to give or accept criticism had to with more than a simple behavior pattern established during the Djogo uproar. It also involved a predisposition to believe that bolshevism's evil intent made rational critique impossible.

## NOTES

- 1 Dobrica Ćosić, *Promene* (Novi Sad: Dnevnik, 1992) 22. *Promene*, published in 1992, is, according to its author, his notebooks for the early 1990s. However, the reader is warned that there is internal evidence that he did in fact go back and insert new information later. I include passages

- from *Promene* that seem consistent with his other reflections; I will not rely on it for any factual information.
- 2 Ćosić, *Promene*, 19.
  - 3 Ćosić, *Promene*, 20–22.
  - 4 “Greh srpskih intelektualaca,” in *Intervju* (Belgrade) May 24, 1991, 45. This interview was translated from the original French version, published in *Journal de Geneve*, by Andjelka Cvijić.
  - 5 Besides Ćosić and Tadić, included were Dušan Bošković (sociologist), Zoran Djindjić (sociologist), Zoran Gavrilović (literary critic), Nebojša Popov (*Praxis* group sociologist), Svetozar Stojanović (*Praxis* group philosopher), Vojislav Stojanović, and Lazar Trifunović (art critic); “Pismo osnivača—saradnicima,” in *Nаша reč* (London) January 1981, 4. See also Slavoljub Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 246–47.
  - 6 “Pismo intelektualcima,” in *Nаша reč* (London) December 1980, 2.
  - 7 “Pismo intelektualcima,” 2.
  - 8 “Pismo intelektualcima,” 3.
  - 9 “Pismo intelektualcima,” 2.
  - 10 Ćosić, *Promene*, 61.
  - 11 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 248.
  - 12 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 250.
  - 13 In particular, the army veterans association (SUBNOR) and General Kosta Nadj attacked Ćosić as the nerve-center of Serbian nationalism. In response, Ćosić demanded that Nadj “publicly cite from *Time of Death*, from any of my published books, or the banned book *Power and Fear*, from any of my public texts—a single sentence with nationalistic or counterrevolutionary content.” Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 252–54. By nationalism, Ćosić understood “chauvinism,” of which there are no unambiguous examples in his writings. However, there are more ways to express nationalism than blatant attacks on other nations: Ćosić had already begun to call for a Serbian national consolidation, and those calls would develop into demands for a full scale national revival by the late 1980s.
  - 14 “It was the initiative of a group of Slovenian cultural workers of the younger-middle generation who after several months of discussion and search for the possibility to found a new cultural review in Slovenia, and indeed after long years of disappointment with the Slovenian cultural situation” collected signatures and made the formal request. The actual proposal was also amazingly similar to that for *Javnost*: points included a more open flow of cultural political viewpoints, rejection of the ideologization of scientific and artistic creation; critique of stalinistic, bourgeois, petit bourgeois, technobureaucratic and other outmoded tendencies in culture and art; etc. Rupel, *Od vojnog do civilnog društva*, 174, 180–81.
  - 15 Jasna Dragović Soso, ‘Saviours of the Nation’: *Serbia’s Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002) 54–56.



- 16 Gojko Djogo, *Vunena vremena* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1992). The title can also mean “fearful times.” The indictment was dated June 12, 1981, before the district court of Belgrade. *Književne novine* published it in its edition of November 5, 1981.
- 17 This outline is taken from the indictment itself and from Stevan Stanić, “Kukavičije jaje Gojka Djoga” in *NIN* (Belgrade) May 24, 1981, 30–31.
- 18 The writer for *NIN* noted with suspicion that of all of the Prosveta house’s publications that spring, only Djogo’s book had sold any copies—causing him to wonder if there was a minor conspiracy afoot. Stanić, “Kukavičije jaje Gojka Djoga,” 30.
- 19 Stanić, “Kukavičije jaje Gojka Djoga,” 30.
- 20 Stanić, “Kukavičije jaje Gojka Djoga,” 30–31.
- 21 All references are taken from Djogo, *Vunena vremena*. The translations are my own.
- 22 “U odbranu Gojka Djoga” in *Naša reč* (London) October, 1981, 2.
- 23 No one, in other words, attacked draconian Yugoslav laws that protected the image and work of Tito even after his death. Instead, they chose to skirt that obstacle and simply argue that the state should stay out of the interpretation of art. See below on the *verbalni delikt*.
- 24 *Naša reč* would be the most reliable source in the 1980s for such protests from within Serbia. Stojković’s and others’ protests appeared in the October, 1981 issue.
- 25 Živorad Stojković, “Otvorena molba sudijama pesniku,” in *Naša reč* (London) October, 1981, 4.
- 26 Miodrag Perišić used this phrase in a retrospective look at the activity of the UKS in the 1980s: “Demokratija u 100 lekcija,” in *NIN* (Belgrade) Sept. 24, 1989, 63.
- 27 “Sastanak beogradskih pisaca” in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) May 27, 1982, p. 2. The committee is referred to in this article as the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedoms (plural). But from that point on, “freedom” (singular) would be used.
- 28 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 159; Danojlić, “Trenutak prijateljstva,” in *Lične stvari*, 172; on Livada, see Odbor za zaštitu umetničke slobode, “Izveštaj o radu,” in *Naša reč* (London) June 1984, no. 356, p. 5. By late 1984, only Dragoslav Mihailović, Nikola Milošević, and Biljana Jovanović would remain; Djordije Vuković, Julija Najman, and Alek Vukadinović had joined the committee by then.
- 29 “Odbor za zaštitu umetničke slobode” in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) September 30, 1982, 2.
- 30 “Beogradska sekcija UKS” in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) February 10, 1983, 2–3.
- 31 Miodrag Perišić, “Demokratija u 100 lekcija,” in *NIN* (Belgrade) Sept. 24, 1989, 63.

- 32 "Iz Udruženje književnika Srbije," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) April 7, 1983, 2.
- 33 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 160–61.
- 34 "Ko će suditi sudijama," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) June 24, 1982, 4.
- 35 Boro Krivokapić, "Srbi su dvoglav narod," in *NIN* (Belgrade) April 12, 1991.
- 36 *Ketman* was a term that Czeslaw Milosz used for the intellectual collaborator, cloaking himself in the linguistic garb of the regime while keeping his contrary views to himself.
- 37 Dušica Milanović, "Vunena vremena—vremena straha" in *Intervju* (Belgrade) October 12, 1990, 48.
- 38 The works of Drašković and Selenić are discussed in Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, 205–209, 219–21.
- 39 Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia, *O nekim idejnim i političkim tendencijama u umjetničkom stvaralaštvu, književnoj, kazališnoj i filmskoj kritici, te o javnim istupima jednog broja kulturnih stvaralaca u kojima su sadržane politički neprihvatljive poruke* (Zagreb: Centar CK SKH za informiranje i propagandu, 1984).
- 40 "Saopštenje," in *Naša reč* (London) November 1984, 8.
- 41 See the letter from Jovica Mihajlović in *Naša reč* (London) August–September 1984, 4. Mihajlović, in a letter intended for, but not published in, *NIN*, describes how he was beaten in the same sweep.
- 42 "Stanetu Dolancu, Saveznom sekretaru za unutrašnje poslove," in *Naša reč* (London) June 1984, no. 356, p. 2.
- 43 The committee's first public declaration was dated November 10, 1984 and can be found in Serbian in *Naša reč* (London) January 1985, 6; a translation is in Oskar Gruenwald and Karen Rosenblum-Cale, eds., *Human Rights in Yugoslavia* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1986) 644–48.
- 44 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 196.
- 45 The first "Announcement of the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression" was published in *Naša reč* (London) in its January 1985 issue (p. 6). An English translation is in Gruenwald and Rosenblum-Cale, eds., *Human Rights in Yugoslavia*, 644–48. Mihiz describes its formation in *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 194–98, Ćosić in Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 264.
- 46 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1981–1991)*, 128.
- 47 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1981–1991)*, 128.
- 48 "Saopštenje Odbora za odbranu slobode misli i izražavanja," in *Naša reč* (London) January 1985, no. 361.
- 49 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 265.
- 50 "Predsedništvima SFRJ i SR BiH," in *Naša reč* (London) August–September 1986, no. 377, 2.
- 51 "Predsedništvu SFRJ, Predsedništvu SR BiH," in *Naša reč* (London) November 1987, no. 389, 6.

- 52 "Saopštenje br. 53," in *Naša reč* (London) March 1987, no. 383, 7. By this time the CPAF membership had turned over completely, with Najman, Vukadinović, Vladislav Ribnikar, Ljiljana Šop, Svetlana Slapsak, Zoran Gluščević, Slobodan Rakitić, Vladeta Janković, Dušan Vukajlović, Aleksandar Petrov, and Gojko Djogo on board. Slapsak wrote the communiqué regarding Demaci.
- 53 This event is described best in Julie Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) 100–114; see also Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 338, 340. For a compilation of Yugoslav reporting that provides the Serbian perspective on the affair, see Svetislav Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović* (Belgrade: Izdavačko-publicistička delatnost, 1986). Spasojević was the reporter who covered the story for *NIN*. The event is often misused by opponents of Serbia and/or Milošević. For instance, Dubravka Ugrešić writes that "the case of Martinović simply confirmed the belief of the Serbian people that the Serbian leader Milošević's decision—to change the constitution violently and revoke the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina—was more than justified!" But Milošević did not even appear on the scene until a year later, and his decision to revoke Kosovo's autonomy followed two years after that, so Ugrešić's logic is at least careless. The Serbian psychosis was wild enough to require no embellishment. See Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998) 71.
- 54 *Politika* (Belgrade) May 4, 1985; quoted in Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 293.
- 55 *Јединство* (Priština) May 4, 1985; quoted in Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 294.
- 56 Svetislav Spasojević, "Slučaj slučaja Martinović" *NIN* (Belgrade) June 16, 1985, 24.
- 57 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 267
- 58 Both of these documents are reproduced in Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 63–69.
- 59 Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 64.
- 60 Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 65. Parenthetical remark is in original.
- 61 Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 66.
- 62 Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 67.
- 63 Spasojević, *Slučaj Martinović*, 68.
- 64 Milisav Savić, "Zapisi sa Kosova," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) September 1, 1985, 10–11.
- 65 The petition was published as "Zahtevi 2016 stanovnika Kosova," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) December 15, 1985, 3.
- 66 For newcomers to the study of Serbia's 1980s, one of the most bracing accusations against the government and against Albanians in Kosovo was

that of "genocide." The term was tossed around quite loosely to an outsider's ears; for Serbs, the genocide was a given and required no explanation. In 1986, Dimitrije Bogdanović, the author of a very contentious book entitled *Knjiga o Kosovu* (Belgrade: SANU, 1985), was interviewed by the Slovenian magazine *Mladina*. Asked "what sort of genocide are we speaking of here," Bogdanović answered: "It concerns genocide of the Serbian nation, of Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins. We can speak of genocide because it concerns the conscious relations towards the ethnic entirety of the nation in Kosovo and Metohija. The aspirations to force the Serbs and Montenegrins from this district and to eliminate them as a cultural, demographic, and biological factor in Kosovo and Metohija are visible. All of those are elements of genocide, according to the definition in international legal decrees." Dimitrije Bogdanović, *Razgovori o Kosovu* (Belgrade: Kosmos, 1986) 106.

67 *Naša reč* reported 213 names; "Protiv gonjenja Srba na Kosovu," *Naša reč* (London) March 1986, 2–4.

68 Danica Milinčić gained notoriety in June 1982, when her son Danilo was murdered in front of their home in the village of Samodreža.

69 "Protiv gonjenja Srba na Kosovu," 2. This petition is translated in Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 49–52.

70 Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 52–55.

71 Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 57.

72 This speech was reprinted in *Naša reč* (London) October 1984, no. 358, p. 2–3.

73 Kosta Mihailović and Vasilije Krestić, *The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts: Answers to Criticisms* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1995) 94.

74 This process is explained in Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, *Godišnjak* v. 93 (Belgrade, 1987) 105.

75 This synopsis is taken from Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 12–14.

76 It was published in Zagreb's *Naše teme* in 1989.

77 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 95.

78 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 137. See also pages 105, 106, and 119.

79 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 96.

80 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 102.

81 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 115.

82 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 103–104.

83 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 105.

84 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 110.

85 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 111.

86 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 113.

87 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 113.

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- 88 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 118.  
89 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 120.  
90 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 121.  
91 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 122.  
92 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 124.  
93 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 126. Note that the rhetoric of “worse defeats in peacetime” comes straight from Ćosić’s *Time of Death* and his SANU speech of 1977.  
94 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 126.  
95 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 127.  
96 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 128.  
97 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 128.  
98 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 132.  
99 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 133.  
100 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 134.  
101 Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 137.  
102 It should be noted that the Memorandum continues with a warning against the dangers of Serbian nationalism; Mihailović and Krestić, *The Memorandum*, 137.  
103 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 280.  
104 Dobrica Ćosić, “O memorandumu srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti,” in Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće*, 158.  
105 Ćosić, “O memorandumu,” 156.  
106 Ćosić, “O memorandumu,” 156–57.



## CHAPTER 9

# The Children of Cain

*Cain, the first son of the first man Adam, kills his only brother Abel, founding the archetype of human existence. Fratricide would remain till this day the constant of human fate...<sup>1</sup>*

Dobrica Ćosić, 1987

Mića Popović and Dobrica Ćosić concluded their reinvention of Serbian identity in the 1980s, continuing as they had to track each other's work and building on themes they had established in the previous decade. Ćosić remained, as always, the more public and influential figure, but Popović at least mirrored, if not led, him in working out his vision of Serbianness. The work of the two friends is complementary but also reveals interesting contrasts. While both emphasize the degrading effect that communism had on Serbian society and the need for somebody to fill the role of savior, their work in the 1980s betrays their unique personalities. Ćosić would remain the expressionless face of Serbian introspection, a moralizing force for societal regeneration; Popović would for the most part play the role of jester to Ćosić's high priest, mixing his warnings of imminent catastrophe with a healthy dose of pointed and often self-deprecatory humor.

### THE JESTER SPEAKS: MIĆA POPOVIĆ'S CONTRARIAN VISION

For Mića Popović, the 1980s were not a particularly productive decade, but those paintings—and one novel—that he did produce concluded the development of his vision with great clarity. When he did articulate it, he did so in an artistic language that steered clear of Ćosić's self-importance; in fact, Popović allowed his idiosyncratic sense of humor to take over. The most effective rendering of Popović's version of the

vision came in 1983, when he painted *The Last Supper without a Savior*. *Last Supper without a Savior* offers an opportunity to examine where Popović, as a representative of the Serbian intellectual elite, saw Serbs, Serbia, and his intellectual colleagues at that point. In some ways, it stands as a complement to *Serbs in the Waiting Room*. Both are built on the argument that Serbs are without guidance and leadership, spiritual or otherwise. Where *Serbs in a Waiting Room* conveys this rudderless and humiliated impression visually, *Last Supper without a Savior* does so by its choice of theme as well as its execution. It is the execution that is radically different in *Last Supper without a Savior*, though. Scenes always had a split personality: on one hand, an almost maudlin pathos pervades many of the paintings and Popović's discussions of them, but on the other hand, they are imbued with a whimsical spirit that one suspects is intrinsic to Popović's personality—he was a person who occasionally had trouble taking things as seriously as others around him (Ćosić, for instance) wished him to. He travelled from that pathos to that whimsy when painting *Serbs in a Waiting Room* and *Last Supper without a Savior*.

*The Last Supper Without a Savior* is a painting of twelve men at a dinner table, with one central chair empty. The men are with one exception contemporary, and many are identifiably Serbian (five wear the šajkača, Danilo Stojković as Gvozden is present, as is Lazar Trifunović, the art critic). The twelve seated are mostly unserious. One shoots a slingshot; another gesticulates while drinking from a pitcher of wine; Gvozden peeps over the shoulder of another man, trying to listen in to his conversation. The rest sit around, eating and chatting. One of the twelve looks annoyed at the rest, while a flag-waver's face is wrapped in the same type of shroud that covered Popović in *Manipulation*. *Last Supper without a Savior* is a picture of a Serbia without leadership, and of Serbs who do not even recognize the seriousness of their predicament. Unlike those in the waiting room, who simply wait, however, these Serbs will dance and drink and talk about—but never act to stop—their collective demise. Here, as with *Serbs in a Waiting Room*, *Јеврем*, *Rear End*, and so many others, Popović has painted a complement to the written work of Ćosić. Would a Serbian savior appear?

As with earlier Scenes, we have Ćosić's commentary, always pulling Popović's artistic vision into line with his own. Ćosić, on *The Last Supper without a Savior*: "Why at this last supper is there no Savior?..."



Did he betray his followers or did his followers betray him? Or is it that Serbs, because they are Serbs, neither have, nor will find, their Savior?...In Mića Popović's experience, Serbs represent disharmony, mutual misunderstanding, eternal estrangement, the absence of a spiritual center, a shared goal and direction..."<sup>2</sup> But whereas *Serbs in a Waiting Room* was frightening and complex, *Last Supper without a Savior* was for Ćosić "illustrative but not deep. Somehow it is too obvious."<sup>3</sup> If Ćosić could not deal with the frivolity of the scene and its characters, it was nonetheless easy for him to accommodate his metaphor of the divisive nation to a painting portraying the eve of Christianity's original act of betrayal.

In harmony with his mischievous side, Popović produced an epistolary novel in 1985/1986 which paraded as a love story but actually strove to get to the heart of Titoism. *The Love Story of Anica Huber* (Velika ljubav Anice Huber) did not make it into the public eye until much later, in part because its reduction of Titoism's appeal to the erotic offended the humor-impaired members of the Serbian intelligentsia to whom Popović passed it in 1986. (It is certainly the only existing critique of Titoism that includes a reference to the dictator's "chiseled penis.") But, in keeping with Popović's (and Ćosić's) premise that the Serbs themselves were responsible for their own degradation, the author not only critiqued Titoists, but also ingenuously tweaked the behavior of his own friends and colleagues in the critical intellectual community. Popović circulated it as samizdat in 1986; it was not formally published until after his death, when it was rediscovered among his papers, in 1999.<sup>4</sup>

To structure his novel, Popović used imaginary letters from Anica Huber, a good Titoist in her sixties, to a journalist from Germany named Ramon. Beginning their correspondence just after Tito's death in 1980, they become lovers. The "love" mentioned in the title, however, is not the love between these two, but rather that of Anica for Tito himself. Romantic tension in the novel (which has no literary function other than to enable Popović to move his project forward) springs from the jealousy that Ramon claims to feel for the dead Tito, who clearly occupied a special place in Anica's heart. It becomes apparent to the reader—but not to the obtuse and narcissistic Anica—that Ramon is using their putative love affair to pry information from her about the past and present of the communist system in Yugoslavia.

The letters really serve as a means for Popović to critique the vacuousness of Titoism and its adherents, tweak the sensibilities of his fellow critics of Titoism, make fun of himself a bit, but most importantly, reduce the appeal of Tito himself to an erotic level.

Titoism emerges as a new religion, and Popović's elucidation of this thesis is rather formulaic. He satirizes the absurd emphasis that the party placed on remaining on Tito's path even after his death: "...to each of us it was clear that His great thought would live also after His physical death, that he would lead us infallibly on the right path..."<sup>5</sup> He ridicules Anica's banal suggestion that Tito knew and understood all: "the President explained that the work of art must be clear, optimistic, and fun. Some of our artists...were not at that moment able to understand the depth and reach of the President's idea..."<sup>6</sup> Tito becomes in the eyes of the reverential the sole true communist: "Perhaps there was only one man devoted to the world Revolution and Socialism, and at the same time without any sort of illusions regarding the realities of the East? Perhaps He knew (or at least suspected) in those distant, distant years the truth which we began to realize only after the war, in 1948."<sup>7</sup>

Popović makes references to his colleagues and friends in the book, most of which operate as inside jokes. Anica, for instance, rips on journalists for interviewing Ćosić as Tito lays dying: "Truly unheard of impudence!"<sup>8</sup> Or, in a self-referential passage: "That M. Popović is no artist at all!...Now that gentleman lives in New York; his masters paid him well indeed for working against his own people."<sup>9</sup> Or in reference to Kosovo: "After the fact, I got mad again remembering D. Ćosić and the multitude of his fantasies about the supposed forced emigration of Serbs from Kosovo. As if Kardelj did not study the whole problem fundamentally and as if he, with the help of the class approach, did not solve those questions for all time."<sup>10</sup>

More interesting than either the true-to-life and thus not particularly subtle critique of the emptiness of Yugoslavs' devotion to Tito, or the inside jokes, is Popović's farcical rendering of the concerns and behavior of his own pals in the critical intelligentsia. Anica's father, no friend of hers, was once a communist but is now consumed by rage at Tito and the communist system.

But his blind hatred toward the most holy personalities and greatest achievements of the Party and the Revolution so deformed

him, that he could only hallucinate and imagine the most unbelievable things that could never have happened in the History of our Party and were logically impossible. My wretched father (now completely crazy) asserts that he saw the most loved son of our nations and nationalities among Austrian soldiers as they hanged citizens and peasants in Mačva in 1914....He says that he saw the leader of our Revolution in 1915 on the occasion of the withdrawal of the Serbian army across Albania. I was honestly saddened when he dragged out the old story that in 1915 our Leader had changed into Albanian clothing and that he shot at Serbian soldiers who were retreating from the long, obsolete guns, so-called muskets.... Who was in the uniform of the Austro-Hungarian soldier who executed my grandfather in 1916? Naturally, He was.... In 1876, the Leader of our Revolution went to Kragujevac as a communist agitator!? While there, Serbian Social-Democrats had to supply him with endless girls.<sup>11</sup>

At the point of its writing, this description was not far removed from the reality of the intellectual critique of Tito; by the late 1980s, the only element of this that would still constitute obvious satire would be the placement of Tito in Kragujevac before he was born. Popović has Anica further ridicule the intelligentsia's obsession with the person of Tito:

For example, last year a friend who has listened in on the conversations... of various dissidents and reactionaries...told me how even those types cannot desist from prattling on about him. In fact, before the beginning of one of their evenings, they unanimously "resolved" that they wouldn't say a word about him, but that they would exclusively discuss "serious themes." And then, says my friend, not five minutes passed and they all began again to babble on about Him alone.<sup>12</sup>

I think that we should take these comments seriously—that, in other words, Popović was not using such stories to poke fun at the Anicas of the world, but rather that he seriously wondered about the focus of a Serbian intellectual elite that could become so obsessed with a single personality. In fact, these passages work well with the theme of "Last

Supper,” which slyly condemned the silliness of Serbs’ intellectual leaders.

Those aspects of Popović’s novel are reduced to mere footnotes when compared to its vital central theme: that the revolution itself was a function of eroticism. Anica Huber leaves no doubt whatsoever that what compelled her to become communist was not ideology, social concerns, or a revolutionary temperament. Instead, this vacuous, unserious woman became a communist because she fell in love with Tito. Popović’s novel is littered with erotic musings; in fact, its fundamental structure is driven by the fact that Ramon has replaced Tito in her heart. It is no accident, either, that where Tito took advantage of her eroticism (and by extension, the erotic sensibilities of millions of Yugoslavs) to trick her into submission, now Ramon the alleged journalist is using her in similar ways to trick her into revealing all she knows about the communist movement in Yugoslavia.

She is easily tricked; this is no particularly sharp woman. This is a communist who thinks that the most important thing to know about Tito is that he always brought chocolate as gifts, and not pears, as Veljko Vlahović had once said in a passing reference.<sup>13</sup> In her recollections, she reduces herself to a sexual essence. Minor references to sex abound: when she is a young teen, her father greets her after a long separation by asking “Aren’t you ashamed of the size of your breasts? Bind them with something!”<sup>14</sup> But the key to Popović’s farce lies in the way that Anica became a woman and a communist: having met Tito, her “days as a girl ended after noon, according to an ancient hindu ritual, by which a virgin is led to the stone deity in order to become a woman on its chiseled penis.”<sup>15</sup> In the end, Anica’s father has figured out the true dynamic. He discovers that Ramon is a spy as well as her lover; upset that she has brought a spy into his life, he writes her a kiss-off letter: “Poor Anica, you have been condemned to see all of your fucks turn out to be spies... You lead your life between crime and kitsch.”<sup>16</sup> “And now Anica, you, your lovers, and your feuilleton writers can go fuck off.”<sup>17</sup>

Popović made thirty copies of “The Love Story of Anica Huber,” numbered them, added his own artwork, and passed them out to friends in 1986. Ćosić is reported to have dismissed it as farce inadequate to explain the dramatic history of the Communist movement in Yugoslavia. Borisav Pekić left his copy in a taxi. Milo Gligorijević, then employed by *NIN*, got small portions published in that magazine,

but nobody would touch the entire manuscript. Subsequent critics have credited the manuscript as an attempt to bring Serbs into contact with their history, But Anica Huber's iterations of Serbian history are inconsequential, buried in a story that is really about a silly woman who was governed by her G-spot more than her conscience or her ideology, and/or an alleged revolutionary whose true appeal was the size and shape of his penis. The emptiness of Communist ideology and the charismatic, even erotic appeal of Tito are the fundamental themes of his book.<sup>18</sup>

As Popović created *The Love Story of Anica Huber*, he was also working on a painting that expressed an entirely different sort of critique of Titoism in Yugoslavia, one that used the sort of language we associate more closely with Ćosić: melodramatic, overserious, and tragic. With this painting, Popović complied with the logic of his own metaphor, offering a crucifixion to accompany his Last Supper. The painting, *May 1, 1985*, memorialized the attack by bottle on Djordje Martinović. White-capped (Albanian) men hoist a man onto the cross; a policeman (the regime) stands guard over the ceremony; a discarded bottle sits in the lower right-hand corner. It is obvious on first glance that this painting depicts something about martyrdom among Albanians, but it leaves a distinctly kitschy first impression which gives no indication to outsiders of why it might have been displayed upon Popović's election to the Serbian Academy, or why Predrag Palavestra would have said within a few years that Popović had given voice to the "poetics of catharsis"<sup>19</sup> in Serbia, or how it could have moved Dobrica Ćosić to claim for Popović the status of Delacroix, Daumier, or Goya.

*May 1, 1985* referenced the *Martyrdom of St. Philip*, a painting by Jusepe de Ribera from 1639 depicting that apostle's crucifixion.<sup>20</sup> The painting, which, like *Last Supper without a Savior*, is built on a religious metaphor and shows Popović moving away from the themes and execution most common to *Scenes*, is Popović's final cry for Serbs to recognize and address their own oppression (he never exhibited another new work). It continues the later emphasis in *Scenes* on direct confrontation with a Serbian, as opposed to universal, essence. What had been painted as documentary (*Vuk, At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends*), minor human tragedy (*Ževrem, Rear End*), malaise (*Serbs in a Waiting Room*), or with a humorous panache (*Last Supper without a Savior*) here was painted as linked with the human

condition, as a question of universal import even as it remained specifically Serbian. And here, and really for the first time, Popović emphasizes the oppression of Serbs by others rather than the divisiveness of the Serbs themselves. Contrast *Last Supper without a Savior* with *May 1, 1985*: the former portrays Serbs as divided and divisive, jolly but unaware of their own sad fate; the latter establishes Serbs as the blameless victims of others. Following the depressing *Serbs in a Waiting Room* and the silly *Last Supper Without a Savior*, it is a mawkish contribution to the cause.

If the painting works, it does so because it addresses a thoroughly modern, twentieth-century problem by reviving the universal language of Christianity as well as older Serbian imagery rooted in the folk tradition, although the latter is only present in the most tenuous way. Serbian cultural memory was prepared in 1986 by Serbia's cultural mythology, as embedded in its oral tradition, to understand a painting that depicted the victimization of Serbs by Muslims; it was prepared to recognize the critical element of self-betrayal implicit in the placement of the blue-uniformed policeman as the overseer of the entire event; it was prepared to draw the conclusion that Serbs once again needed to come together to forestall the advance of foreign hordes. The memory was prepared, but this painting attempts no revival of the Kosovo epic, no continuation of a Serbian commitment to avenge the death of Tsar Lazar. Instead, it is instantly recognizable as a critique of the effects of that twentieth-century curse on the Serbs, bolshevism. The fact that Serbs' fate is rendered as a crucifixion tells us that Popović sees the death of Djordje Martinović as much more profoundly compelling than any lost, ancient battle; the treatment of Serbs by Albanians and their patrons, the Communists of Yugoslavia, is of universal importance.

In June 1986, Popović was elected a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). His acceptance speech, entitled "The Work of Art as the Last Bastion of a People," was delivered to an audience confronted by *May 1, 1985* as it entered the hall. In his speech, Popović would elaborate a new and, one supposes, more honest definition of engagement than the one that he had allowed to stand since the first *Scenes* exhibition in 1971. But since Tito's death he had been working towards a more open acknowledgment of the way that his art functioned. In 1983, for instance, Popović moved a few steps beyond his claim that he was a mere witness: his "engagement could

be understood as a sort of *pragmatism*, but not in the service of ideology (of any sort), but in the service of *truth*.”<sup>21</sup> Here Popović provides the only plausible argument for the assertion that his work is pure witnessing and not political: they tell the truth—for him a pure and unvarnished truth; for us, it is simply his truth. In his speech to SANU in 1986, he would further develop his claim, to the point that he almost asks his listeners to grant the artist the status of seer.

Popović’s speech addresses two topics: the type of society in which he lives, and the art that is appropriate to that society. He argued that his Yugoslavia was “under the hegemony of a historical forgery and civil and political force...”<sup>22</sup> His state was “arbitrary and self-satisfied and has...ended civil liberties and destroyed the pyramid of moral and earthly values...”<sup>23</sup> an “autarchic, narcissistic state [that] uses, aside from direct terror, other techniques as well: dumbing-down through repetition, electoral farces, and national or international ideals, whenever and wherever. But force remains what it is, no matter which abstraction produced it.”<sup>24</sup> This type of state “destroys the nation’s essence.”<sup>25</sup> For Popović, in this kind of state, under the long-term occupation of a foreign and self-serving idea, art becomes the “last chance” which the people will not reject, “because it is indeed the last.”<sup>26</sup> “A nation...begins to trust the work of art as though it were a prayer for salvation, because in ruinous conditions, it speaks the truth in a direct language.”<sup>27</sup>

The art about which Popović speaks “has always been a moral act before it became an aesthetic fact.”<sup>28</sup> “Art which takes the side of truth and not cliché, the side of freedom and not brutality, can be a reliable signpost for a people ‘that has been deprived of the right to differ,’” he told his audience.<sup>29</sup> The argument that art “must remain in the artistic zone as if on some reservation, and that it need not mix in life, morals, politics, and fate, is insupportable and senseless,” Popović argued.<sup>30</sup> Like many other intellectuals in Serbia during these convulsive years, he reserved for the artist/literary figure the right to filter and interpret the truth to a waiting nation: “The way and conditions in which a work of art is created are not important, nor is the area of truth about which it speaks; the important thing is the *truth* as a driving force, as a multifold revelation. Repressive societies are allergic to any sort of truth, even when it concerns the possibilities of the development of form in the sphere of pure artistic abstraction.”<sup>31</sup> *May 1, 1985* played a

powerful role in the whole presentation. Popović addressed the work: "The title of the painting is *May 1 1985*. It not only poses the question of what happened on May 1st that year, but, above all, why this question has not been answered so far."<sup>32</sup> Popović answers that question for himself, in the painting. The farmer was martyred by Albanian nationalists who were given free rein by the Titoist regime. But was this *the* truth? For Popović, as we know, the truth was "a driving force, a *multifold revelation* [my italics]," so all that was necessary was that Serbs perceive essential elements of the truth in the work of art. If Serbs recognized and comprehended their persecution in that painting, then it told the truth.

Popović was not shy about placing his painting in a heroic context: he compared it implicitly with the work of Goya (whose *3 May 1808* undoubtedly inspired his own title), Daumier, Delacroix, Picasso, and Kollwitz. He also placed it in a line of Serbian works dealing in print or in paint with Serbian migrations, including the paintings of Paja Jovanović and the writings of Miloš Crnjanski and Dobrica Ćosić.<sup>33</sup>

### ĆOSIĆ IN A TIME OF EVIL

Unlike Popović, Ćosić had no sense of humor. His influence was rooted in his ability and willingness to incorporate Serbian cultural symbols, his version of the history of Serbs in the twentieth century, and above all his own personal fate under communism into a single compelling vision. According to this vision, he and his Serbian people are treacherous at heart, plagued by a tendency to betray and kill one another; they are fratricidal. Beyond Serbs, Ćosić wove a tapestry in which all peoples were conceived of as fratricidal, as the children of Cain. As Ćosić believed he had emerged from the darkness of servitude to corrupt communist masters who had instrumentalized fratricide, he believed that Serbs could conquer their own fratricidal past and eventually save themselves and their nation through revival and consolidation along national lines. Division, betrayal, self-sacrifice, and renewal are not novel themes in Serbian culture. Ćosić's gift was to be able to transform these images of division into a potion that contemporary Serbian society could understand. In the process of Ćosić's revival and recasting of these themes, they became standard components of the nationalist message imbibed by Serbs in the 1980s. Ćosić



employed the authority that he enjoyed, as the one-time communist who understood both that tyrannical system and the need to escape it, to volunteer a framework for understanding Serbia's degradation.

Ćosić's ascent to the pinnacle of the Serbian critical intelligentsia was spurred by this beguiling vision of fratricidal Serbia, which achieved acceptance among a broad spectrum of people in Serbian cultural and intellectual life. But even by the mid-1980s, Ćosić was not yet personally popular among the Serbian intelligentsia—there were too many ideological fissures in Serbia's intellectual community to allow for that, since Ćosić remained a man of the left whose captivity by the Tito regime had not been forgotten. So Ćosić prepared his *mea culpa*—his explanation for his own seduction by communism. In interviews, in his trilogy *Time of Evil*, and in his public presentations, he would explain that he had foolishly but idealistically fallen into a seductive but corrupt communist movement; most importantly, in admitting his own failure, he offered other Serbian Titoists an explanation for their own lapse: the movement was devoted to taking and twisting idealistic souls like theirs, as it had his. Ćosić's melding of his personal history with that of postwar Serbia flourished in the late 1980s: as he was once a true believer, so were the Serbian people; as he was a shocked observer of the "betrayal" of Serbia by Tito and his regime, so were the Serbian people. At that point, however, Ćosić and his Serbian people parted ways—whereas he recognized the workings, and predicted the outcome, of Tito's exploitation of the Serbian people, that people had been deceived to the point that it could no longer even recognize its own degradation, feel its own humiliation. For Ćosić, much more than malicious Titoism was at work. Ćosić believed that Tito had done with the Serbs what the Serbs allowed him to do, as a result of what Ćosić saw as Serbs' deeply flawed, divisive and corruptible, collective character. Fighting external enemies but also each other, Serbs, according to Ćosić needed a revival. Who better to fuel such a revival than the apostate Titoist himself?

Ćosić's apologia began to emerge as fiction in 1985. *Time of Evil* acted as a parable to explain Ćosić's loss of faith in communism, and as such, and in spite of its mediocre literary quality, is politically his most revealing work of fiction. The first volume, *The Sinner* (Grešnik), appeared in 1985; the second, *The Heretic* (Otpadnik) in 1986; and the final two-volume installment, *The Believer* (Vernik) after a longer lapse,

in 1990. *Time of Evil* is a continuation of Ćosić's saga of the Katić family, this time with a general focus on Ivan Katić, the intellectual son of Vukašin, the central figure of *Time of Death*. Ivan is the sinner of the first volume, while Bogdan Dragović, a Serbian bolshevik who was also his brother-in-law, is the heretic of volume two. Vladimir Dragović, the partisan son of Bogdan and Ivan's sister Milena, plays the role of one of the believers in volume three. Like *Time of Death*, *Time of Evil* is sprinkled with historical figures: Dragiša Vasić and Slobodan Jovanović appear in the flesh, while the characters of Bogdan Dragović and Petar Bajević are modeled after two prewar Serbian communists (Živojin Pavlović and Mustafa Golubović, respectively). The inescapable point of the trilogy: that communism is a dishonest movement and ideology which divides father from son, brother from brother.

*Time of Evil* traces the fate of the Katićes of Prerovo, Ćosić's Yoknapatawpha County, from the end of the First World War to 1941 and the destruction of the first Yugoslavia. The novel begins its examination of the period from the perspective of 1935 or thereabouts, with the earlier period covered only in flashbacks. The result is mawkish, as the reader views Yugoslavia's creation through the prism of its failure and as communism's idealistic appeal is treated as nothing more than the artifice of a cynical and manipulative Stalinist system. Thus Ćosić presents Yugoslavia, on its last legs by the beginning of the novel, as a tragically misguided project in which Serbs (at best) invested too much time and energy or (at worst) were exploited and then discarded by other Yugoslavs. We see communism, inspiring to Serbia's disillusioned youth after the First World War, as it begins to devour its adherents. Illusions dashed, the Katićes live out their fates.

*Time of Evil*, like *Time of Death*, offers a plethora of characters who all serve as foci at some point or another. Unlike the earlier trilogy, here the characters are sharply drawn and plainly metaphoric. As Vukašin arguably occupied the central position in *Time of Death*, now Ivan's fate draws *Time of Evil's* story together. Ivan, in an Austrian prison as *Time of Death* closed, followed his charismatic and heroic wartime comrade Bogdan Dragović into the ranks of communists immediately following the war. Never joining the party (a failure that rendered him a second-class revolutionary in the eyes of Dragović and his mates), he still performed services for it, whether as a courier or, more often, as a writer of pamphlets and other propaganda material.

As *The Sinner* opens, Ivan is verbally and physically accosted by members of the communist youth as he returns home one night. He has just published an appreciative article about Andre Gide's denunciation of the Stalinist trials in the Soviet Union, and Bogdan Dragović, his brother-in-law, has responded by branding Ivan a traitor to the cause in the communist press. With such a beginning to the novel, the reader remains unexposed to the idealism and hope that presumably inspired Ivan to embrace communism in the aftermath of the First World War, except in flashbacks that serve to bridge *Time of Death* and *Time of Evil*. Those flashbacks are inevitably morose reminiscences of his earlier faith, which had been motivated by the fact that "with the long and expensive war that was our Serbian war, neither peace nor freedom were gained...Our peace immediately began with a rush to power, a rush to careers...in the moral behavior of people, probably nothing was as vulgar and base as those first postwar years."<sup>34</sup> Given his disgust with postwar Serbian society, he had looked to communism as inspiration: he "had once passionately believed in the appearance of the 'new man'!"<sup>35</sup>

*The Sinner* focuses loosely on Ivan Katić's suffering as an outcast from a party he never really belonged to, except in spirit. *The Heretic* is devoted almost entirely to the fate of Bogdan Dragović, Ivan's best friend, brother-in-law, but now tormentor, who led off the attacks on Ivan with an article entitled "The Mask Has Fallen," which argued that Ivan was a traitor to the working class and to the party for having endorsed attacks on Stalin's trials, then ongoing in Moscow. Bogdan is predictably caught up in the cleansing himself, called to Moscow to account for his actions and his loyalties. He survives his initial trials before the Comintern's control commission, is sent back out into the field to work in Germany, but is finally ordered back to Moscow where he knows that he will share the fate of earlier purge victims: immediate execution, or life in a Siberian camp. Convinced of his own righteousness, he makes his way back to Yugoslavia, where he strikes a deal with an old police friend: he will retire and return to his own village, so long as he is not required to publicly renounce his beliefs and denounce his party. Like Ivan before him, he faces rejection by his own people, not just communists but family members: in Bogdan's case, his son Vladimir, whom he has raised to submit completely to the will of the party. As *The Heretic* ends, Vladimir spits on his own father.

In the final volume in the trilogy, entitled *The Believer*, there is no clear title character: it could be Vladimir, who enthusiastically follows his fellow communist youth “into the forest” as the Second World War begins; it could be Bogdan, who uses his village exile to author a tract proclaiming Stalin a corrupt perversion of communist purity; it most likely is Petar Bajević, Bogdan’s best friend and comrade in the communist movement who had moved on to serve the Soviet intelligence services directly as an agent and assassin. But, it could even be Ivan, who attempts patriotically to join the Partisans in 1941, only to be rejected by the party in the form of his own cousin, the Partisan commissar Dušan Katić. *The Believer* traces the fates of all four (plus those of Vukašin and Milena, Ivan’s sister and Bogdan’s wife). *The Believer* ends with Vladimir’s best friend Miško Pub leading a firing squad that executes Bogdan (on the orders of Petar Bajević), as the communist movement with finality conquers traditional relationships, between fathers and sons and between best friends. The trilogy follows suit, as the reader is exposed to the destruction of the Katić family by the pernicious ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

*Time of Evil* is a story of despair, the Katić family serving as a metaphor for Serbian society as a whole, divided and destroyed by toxic communism. The structure of the novel is drawn from biblical imagery. The new faith is Stalinism, but for Ćosić its power is akin to that of faith in Christ, as is reinforced by the titles of the volumes, the repetitive Cain/Abel metaphor, and the invocation of Abraham as the first father who had to sacrifice his son to a faith.<sup>36</sup> To complete the Biblical symbolism, near the end of the trilogy, one of the “believers,” Petar Bajević, even requests that he be crucified by his Nazi captors, who are about to execute him (his request is granted).<sup>37</sup> Cain and Abel become the pervasive guides through the lives of the Katićs: readers of *Time of Evil* are overwhelmed by constant references to “fratricide” (loosely defined as homicidal antagonism between members of a family, between loyal friends, or between members of fraternal peoples). Also omnipresent as a theme in the novel is an oppressive search for “truth.” The two axes of the novel, fratricide and truth, even become mingled regularly: for instance, early in *The Sinner*, Milena Katić (wife of Bogdan, sister of Ivan) finds herself between loyalties, loyalties that define the tension in *Time of Evil*: “I waver between brother and husband. Between truth and lies. My life-long illusion.”<sup>38</sup> Later, when

Vladimir, Milena and Bogdan's son, condemns Ivan, Milena asks him, "is the party really above truth, above honor, above me, Vladimir!" He answers, "truth is on the side of the party, mama. And I will not waver between it and my uncle."<sup>39</sup> "Truth" and the party are a sacred coupling for Vladimir, who will abandon his family in their name. Ćosić drives his point home throughout the long trilogy. A policeman tells Bogdan Dragović that "a revolutionary dare not have a son. Because he will murder his father."<sup>40</sup> Ćosić reminds us that "Vladimir Dragović is not the first son who was betrayed by his father, nor will he be the first son who must forget his father the traitor."<sup>41</sup> Vukašin Katić, recognizing that he will be executed by the Germans in retaliation for Partisan attacks, decides that "he will not flee that punishment for his grandson's battle. That is final human and civic duty: to pay with his head for his grandson's error..."<sup>42</sup>

So the "truth" is that communism served to introduce fratricide into Serbian society? Probably not. In *Time of Evil*, fratricide (and its kindred concepts: treason, betrayal) finds proponents of all ideological stripes as a defining characteristic of human existence. Willi Grass, a Nazi colonel, who interrogates Petar Bajević late in *The Believer*, asserts that

Treason is in our fate. Not only in our profession. You do not have to agree with me, because you are a follower of a hypocritical ideology. But, Mr. Bajević, it is my conviction that man is by nature a traitor. He betrays love, friends, ideas, God. Even Jesus Christ, on the cross, at one point doubted his father and was prepared to betray his faith. I personally believe that he asked Pontius Pilate to take him down from the cross, but the Roman was a true soldier and did not allow himself to be outplayed by some Jewish schismatic. That characteristic of treason is a fundamental trait of the Slavic race.<sup>43</sup>

A member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Sveta Rakić, also identifies fratricide as a deeper function of humanity: "Today with words, and tomorrow perhaps with bullets. As in the French revolution with the guillotines. The battle against one's own must be more merciless than the battle against others.... What can be done here? It is something of a human law, good God!

It is. Human history began with fratricide. Will we really, Bogdan, become Cains and murder our Abels?"<sup>44</sup> Rakić answers his own question somewhat later: "Revolution is in its essence patricide. And I already... feared that fratricide would become incorporated into our ideology, that we could become Cains who will be obligated to murder our Abels....Today we kill for power. Yes, for power."<sup>45</sup> The confusing fact of the matter is that virtually all of the characters in *Time of Evil* speak of the eternal power of fratricide. Thus, rather than a peculiarly fratricidal ideology, communism leaves only the most modern in a long line of fratricidal imprints.

Ćosić's presentation is held together by the universal search for truth in which each character engages. All seek, but the reader gathers that only Vukašin and Ivan—both of whom question the wisdom of following the Comintern—speak with Ćosić's voice. Ivan worries that socialism demands that its adherents ignore universal truths in favor of Stalin's truth: "What will socialism be, Bogdan, if we sacrifice truth to it?...I can not accept a socialism in which truth is not its constitution, its law, its public word. All that man does, all that people think, work, and speak, must be reflected in the truth!"<sup>46</sup> Later, the reader can only sympathize with Ivan as Bogdan explains Ivan's failure to Vladimir: "Truth was more important [to him] than the future of the world, and personal liberty more pressing than revolution."<sup>47</sup> Vukašin claims to be a man who "never publicly supported a single thing in which he did not believe. And which was not the truth."<sup>48</sup> Ćosić establishes so completely the fact that Ivan and Vukašin deal only in the truth that the reader can only conclude that the pronouncements that he has them utter are to be taken as Ćosić's truths. Thus, Europe becomes a place "in which prisons exist for people whose only guilt is that they were born Serbs and that they had to defend their pathetic liberty."<sup>49</sup> Austria-Hungary becomes the "personification of the planned degradation of man, executed in the name of the victorious German race, of a Catholic, proselytizing, European, anti-Slavic, and anti-Serbian ideology."<sup>50</sup> Serbs, predictably, become a people who "from Saint Sava onward have moved from one mistake to another."<sup>51</sup>

If Ćosić's world view holds that men are by nature fratricidal, his novel is also informed by more specific grievances about the role that bolshevism has played in Serbia's modern history. Most fundamentally, *Time of Evil* reminds modern Serbian readers that the universal

explanation of the Communist International for Yugoslavia's ills was the wicked Serbian bourgeoisie. On many occasions through the novel, the reader is subjected to abject affirmations that the Serbian middle class, and its dynasty, the Karadjordjevićs, deserve the majority of the blame for the inequities embodied in the first Yugoslavia. Bogdan Dragović, before the Comintern control commission in Moscow:

Since I have been a member of the Communist party, I have felt as a Serb responsible for all evils which the Great-Serbian bourgeoisie commits against the enslaved Yugoslav peoples. I was among the first Serbian communists who accepted the Comintern's position on the destruction of Versailles Yugoslavia into soviet republics. I immediately pronounced myself on the position of comrade Stalin on the national question.<sup>52</sup>

"We know well," he later concludes, "that Yugoslavia is the prison of peoples. The prison of the Great Serbian bourgeoisie."<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Dragović's communist youth cell in Belgrade is treated to a visit by a higher functionary in the party who reminds them that the "governing Great Serbian clique, creating of Yugoslavia a prison of nations, carries out the most brutal theft and exploitation of the working class and poor strata."<sup>54</sup> There are also regular reminders that the Comintern merely followed a path first trod by Austria-Hungary. Vukašin Katić:

Yugoslavia has become the misfortune of the Serbian and Croatian peoples. It has become the political damnation of this land. Yugoslavia is the revenge of the defeated Austria-Hungary on those who defeated it and its former subjects....From the grave, Austria-Hungary poisons the souls of Croats...it tortures us, sucks our blood like a vampire. And via the Comintern, it persecutes us. Communists think like Austro-Hungarians about Yugoslavia. They hate [Yugoslavia] with their hatred, destroy [Yugoslavia] with its anti-Serbian convictions.<sup>55</sup>

The *truth* about *Time of Evil* seems to be that it ultimately critiques Serbia's exposure to outside ideas, the outside world. From Vukašin to Ivan to Vladimir, the Katićs expose themselves to more and more foreign notions. It is as though Ćosić has now given up on his own call

(in *Far Away is the Sun*) for Serbs and Yugoslavs to join the modern, industrial, well-fed, and educated world, for that world has brought them only violence and betrayal. "We all flee from our Prerovos,"<sup>56</sup> Vukašin tells his grandson Vladimir; Vukašin fled to Belgrade from his father Aćim, Ivan fled his own father's Belgrade and Yugoslavia to study in Paris and become a communist, and Vladimir fled even further into the abstract future of the obedient bolshevik, leaving behind father, uncle, and grandfather in a search for a better world. But the wise Vukašin knows from experience that there is no better future: "... there is no happiness in liberty or in progress; there is only a different suffering.... One does not live long on faith in the future, do you know that, Vladimir? The rain drains away our ideals. The best do not arrive at the goal, only the skilled and the cunning do..."<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, great idealists seeking great change (people like Bogdan and Vladimir) can only bring suffering: "Small evils are done out of cupidity and by force of habit," writes Ivan Katić in his memoir, "great evils are the works of faith and conviction. Only great idealists can do great evils without repentance: ideals liberate them from pangs of conscience."<sup>58</sup> The despair that pervades *Time of Evil* is the despair of the exhausted, who have suffered a century of evils rooted in ideologies promising change and progress.

#### REINTRODUCING SIMINA 9A

In 1988, Dobrica Ćosić once again introduced the work of Mića Popović to Serbia, this time under much more propitious circumstances. *Mića Popović, Time, and Friends* incorporated his notes from the 1974 exhibition catalog (which had been immediately withdrawn from circulation when the exhibition was closed down), but added commentary on Popović's newer paintings as well as more complete mytho-biographies of the members of the Simina 9a collective.

Ćosić's commentaries on various paintings were imaginative and instructive. They coordinated Popović's view of Serbia's fate with his own; the writer gave his imagination free rein. Several of them were put directly to use in the service of his own historical vision of Serbia. The sketchy *Jevrem*, for instance, gained detail in the retelling: "He is truly one of ours. And where is he squatting? Perhaps in a concrete basement of an apartment block, waiting for some power-



ful man from back home to find him work? Or is he in jail, because of something he did out of necessity...?"<sup>59</sup> Even more detailed was the fate of the owner of the *Rear End*, who we could only now know was a "sufferer with the empty sack [who] does not relieve himself, because he has nothing to 'relieve,' tortured by dysentery, he 'relieves' only slimy blood..."<sup>60</sup> With no blood or slime to be seen on the canvas, we know that Ćosić was framing this otherwise degrading enough painting for the disengaged. To the tortured Serbs of the past, Ćosić added the depressed Serbs of the present, as in *Serbs in a Waiting Room*, who "seem to be in some waiting room. Not for a train, not for a bus. Rather, historical. Or raz-historical [thus reviving his own neologism from *A Fable*]. But why do they still wait? The train left them for the future, it seems to me, long ago..."<sup>61</sup> Finally, Ćosić did not like *May 1, 1985*. He believed that its mixing of metaphors, its recollection of the crucifixion of Christ on one hand and the impalement of the Christian by Muslims on the other, degraded this particular event, which should have stood "as a symbol of Albanian violence towards Serbs in the second half of the twentieth century, just as the gas chamber and crematorium became the symbol of Nazi German crimes against Jews and Slavs." It also bothered him that Popović utilized universal (historical, Christian) symbols to express truths about the contemporary world. Ćosić seemed to think that Serbia's fate deserved more than this painting had to offer, which was fundamentally derivative and hardly up to the task of portraying the depth of evil that had befallen Serbs. Nevertheless, for Ćosić, the painting offered evidence that Popović had "that consciousness and conscience that distinguished Francisco Goya, Eugene Delacroix, and Daumier."<sup>62</sup> But Popović's Serbs became Ćosić's Serbs, and no matter how much credit he gave the painter for his illustrious company, Ćosić could not resist tying these Serbs' fate to his own. Who, he asked, "can today admire the Serbian nation for the fact that in war it defeated the great, but in peace was ruined by the weak? It's all the same. I've been enthroned as a nationalist by those who usurped the inviolable right in our lives to enthrone, but only on hot, fetid, thrones, I am enthroned, thus, as a Serbian nationalist."<sup>63</sup>

As important as Ćosić's cooptations of Popović's paintings was the fact that this book would serve to make Simina 9a, if only for a few years, a signpost in the Serbian cultural and political renewal. It joins

brief versions of the same story from his 1974 catalog notes, from a book-length interview of Popović published in 1983, and from later autobiographical writings of Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz in the project of establishing the men of Simina 9a as role models for a new generation of Serbs. The qualities that Ćosić chose to emphasize were those that fit the times in Serbia. The men all exhibited the same traits in various forms: sincerity, profound intelligence, tolerance, devotion to their Serbian nation. Together they had grown old, no longer spoke of the past together. The single thing that still united them was that “the fate of Yugoslavia and the Serbian nation still tortures us...regarding Kosovo, we have grown mute.”<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps the most critical aspect of their collective personality was, according to Ćosić, their willingness to listen to other opinions—they remained, in other words, the tolerant “targomen” of Simina 9a, even forty years later. Mihiz, for instance, had an “unbelievable capacity for understanding his opponents and those who thought differently than him”; he was “always prepared for dialogue and to be corrected, prepared to act morally and honorably, of acute and strong judgment and a good and soft soul...”<sup>65</sup> “Žika Stojković was “always sincere, which is to say unpleasant. A wise, faithful, precious, and difficult friend.”<sup>66</sup> “...With every book, article, and speech I’ve written, I could not help but worry: what will Žika say? Because he will tell me exactly what he thinks, things no one else will say.”<sup>67</sup> “In a society in which the lie is the truth, his love of truth becomes a vice.”<sup>68</sup> Regarding Pavle Ivić: “if one opposes him with intolerance and hard-headedness, he will answer with tolerance and a gentle compromise.”<sup>69</sup> Only Mihajlo Djurić, a legendary egomaniac, could not be included among the self-effacing and open-minded: “he was self-conscious, an egoist, often contemptuous of different opinions in our collective of free-thinkers. At that time, he never praised anyone.”<sup>70</sup> But Djurić had other qualities that recommended him: along with Stojković, he was “the most uncompromising intellectual”;<sup>71</sup> he was “a true stoic, of rigid morals and tending to moralizing, an incorruptible soul, he was the most active intellectual of our spiritual circle; more concentrated and active even than Mića Popović.”<sup>72</sup>

As important as their tolerance were their varied political beliefs. Ćosić, and Mihiz also, had always been proud of their diverse orientations. Mihiz, according to Ćosić, began adulthood as “a soft leftist,”

becoming a “reflective conservative” later in life.<sup>73</sup> Žika Stojković came in for the most interesting description—he was “by political conviction, an enlightened absolutist.”<sup>74</sup> Bata Mihailović, who had in 1974 been described by Ćosić as a “fanatical communist” and vehemently objected to that characterization, became in 1988 a “leftist and non-conformist” who was “mostly on the same side” with Ćosić in “ideological discussions and arguments against our house ‘reaction’...”<sup>75</sup> Conceding the obvious despite his own rejection of the term when applied to himself, Ćosić allowed that Mihiz was “a nationalist without any hatred, and a soulful and cultural cosmopolitan.”<sup>76</sup> On many occasions Ćosić described Popović’s nationalism in the same terms—nationalist, loved his people, but he was no chauvinist.<sup>77</sup> Regarding Stojković, he said that he did “not know a contemporary who could more convincingly worry the national and social worries, who could suffer the people’s defeats and misfortunes longer.”<sup>78</sup> But then there was Djurić, who Ćosić believed was wrongly labeled a nationalist in 1971, when he “laid out his opinion that that constitution placed Serbia and the Serbian nation in an unequal position with the other nations and would lead to its and Yugoslavia’s disintegration. For this brave truth he got a year of prison.”<sup>79</sup>

The importance of the work of Ćosić and Popović in the 1990s is straightforward. Here they finally openly claimed their place among the seers of modern Serbia. Here what had been implicit until then became open. They staked their claim to the revelatory role in reconceptualizing Serbian identity. What would they do in practice? How would they do it? As always, Ćosić was the more open and loquacious of the two, even as he proved either unwilling or incapable of enunciating a clear set of objectives. If we were to believe him, the revelation would be enough. Ćosić wouldn’t have been Ćosić had he not engaged (in the third person) in a little mythmaking on his own account (in spite of his insistence that “nobody has to believe this, but he truly has no internal need to speak about himself.”)<sup>80</sup> His primary purpose was to establish the limitations of his self-appointed task: “He does not wish to call into question a single contemporary lie or misapprehension about himself, nor to confirm their truth and conviction.” And, as would be the case to the bitter end, he argued that his role was to speak a little “meaningful” truth; in this case, insisting that “If he has done something good in his literary and public life, if he came

to understand and speak any meaningful truth...in good measure that is thanks to those who loved that truth and to his friends.”<sup>81</sup> What remains is to determine what he and the others actually did, when they were not the subjects of Ćosić’s nostalgic imagination.

## NOTES

- 1 Dobrica Ćosić, “Pisac u istorijskom paklu,” *Književne novine* (November 1, 1987) 5.
- 2 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 237.
- 3 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 237.
- 4 Mića Popović, *Velika ljubav Anice Huber* (Belgrade: Triptih, 1999).
- 5 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 11.
- 6 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 12.
- 7 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 71.
- 8 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 24.
- 9 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 43–44.
- 10 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 86.
- 11 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 21–22.
- 12 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 82–83.
- 13 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 103.
- 14 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 29.
- 15 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 75.
- 16 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 140.
- 17 Popović, *Velika ljubav*, 142.
- 18 V. Milivojević, “Osveščivanje uspavanog naroda,” in *Glas javnosti* (Belgrade) March 15, 2000; M.F., “Kratak kurs istorije KPJ,” in *Danas* (Belgrade) November 6, 1999.
- 19 Predrag Palavestra, *Književnost: Kritika ideologije* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1991) 347.
- 20 This painting was once thought to be a rendering of the martyrdom of St. Bartholomew; Popović was under that impression as he painted “May 1, 1985.” See Michael Scholz-Hansel, *Jusepe de Ribera, 1591–1652* (Cologne: Konemann, 2000) 9.
- 21 Gligorijević, *Odgovor*, 32.
- 22 Mića Popović, “Umetničko delo kao poslednja odbrana jednog naroda,” in *Glas* (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, odeljenje likovne i muzičke umetnosti) v. 356, no. 4, (1988) 19.
- 23 Popović, “Umetničko delo,” 23.
- 24 Popović, “Umetničko delo,” 23.
- 25 Popović, “Umetničko delo,” 22.

- 26 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 25.
- 27 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 19.
- 28 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 19.
- 29 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 22, as translated in Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 106.
- 30 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 24.
- 31 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 24, as translated in Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 110.
- 32 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 27, as translated in Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 128.
- 33 Popović, "Umetničko delo," 21, 22.
- 34 Dobrica Ćosić, *Grešnik* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1985) 119.
- 35 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 22.
- 36 Dobrica Ćosić, *Vernik* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991) 68–69.
- 37 Ćosić, *Vernik*, 556–57.
- 38 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 37.
- 39 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 39.
- 40 Ćosić, *Vernik*, 41.
- 41 Ćosić, *Vernik*, 307.
- 42 Ćosić, *Vernik*, 394.
- 43 Ćosić, *Vernik*, 498.
- 44 Ćosić, *Otpadnik* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1986) 96.
- 45 Ćosić, *Otpadnik*, 172.
- 46 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 185.
- 47 Ćosić, *Otpadnik*, 306.
- 48 Ćosić, *Vernik*, 244.
- 49 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 47–48.
- 50 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 50.
- 51 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 136.
- 52 Ćosić, *Otpadnik*, 93.
- 53 Ćosić, *Otpadnik*, 246.
- 54 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 324.
- 55 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 335.
- 56 Ćosić, *Otpadnik*, 27.
- 57 Ćosić, *Otpadnik*, 28.
- 58 Ćosić, *Grešnik*, 21.
- 59 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 68.
- 60 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 222.
- 61 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 198.
- 62 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 175. In an interview with the author on July 29, 2002, Ćosić dismissed "May 1, 1985" as one of Popović's worst paintings, a product of anger rather than contemplation.
- 63 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 198.

- 64 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 129.  
65 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 130.  
66 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 134. One example of his unpleasantness and his difficult nature is the fact that it was Stojković who demanded that Ćosić delete all references to him in his first, 1974, notes to the Popović exhibition.  
67 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 134.  
68 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 134.  
69 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 135.  
70 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 137.  
71 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 134.  
72 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 137.  
73 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 130.  
74 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 135.  
75 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 35, 139.  
76 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 130.  
77 Author's interview with Dobrica Ćosić, July 29, 2002.  
78 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 134.  
79 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 138.  
80 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 144.  
81 Ćosić, *Mića Popović*, 144.

## CHAPTER 10

# The Limits of Revelation

Between 1985 and 1991, Dobrica Ćosić focused on guiding Serbia's intellectuals to a common position on the status of Serbia in Tito's Yugoslavia. In doing so, he emphasized several themes: the guilt of Serbs for their own tragic fate, the negative role that communism had played among the Serbs, the Serbophobia of other nations of Yugoslavia, and the need for a national renaissance. He was successful in articulating and transmitting this vision of Serbia's situation. Beyond that, he would argue that the burden was on Serbs themselves to solve their myriad problems in Yugoslavia. But, in spite of his constant and varied reiterations of that point, Ćosić was more successful at articulating the problem than he was at providing solutions, and he met with only marginal success in providing any positive and practical roadmap to that better future. It is possible, in fact, to argue that his job was done once his vision of Serbianness had taken hold, and by the mid-1980s, it probably had. He was, I think, more interesting as a developing nationalist than he was as the fully-fledged father of his nation. Nonetheless, his enormous influence commands our attention in this period, which would be capped by several really bad political decisions—decisions that helped seal the fate of his beloved Serbian people in the 1990s.

### THE CAFÉ “DARKNESS”

The impression left by Ćosić's work in the late 1980s is of a narcissistic whiner. Following the death of Tito, Ćosić's diaries began to fill with passages that went beyond his usual fulminations regarding the thanklessness of the Serbian position in Yugoslavia. In April, 1982, for instance, he wrote a long passage detailing the comprehensive de-

Serbianization processes that he believed were occurring in Yugoslavia. "The desire for an 'ethnically pure Kosovo,'" he wrote, "would not be possible without the parallel ethnic homogenization and assimilation of Serbs in other republics. Above all in Macedonia. The Macedonian communists simply Macedonianized the Serbs...committed ethno-cide on the territory of their republic..."<sup>1</sup> He questioned whether "that 'fluctuating mass' of Macedonian Slavs" should even be "recognized as a nationality." Montenegro was another site of the assimilation of Serbs. "The de-Serbianization of Serbs in SR Montenegro, per Comintern decision and the directives of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, flowed stubbornly on...and at the same time, the assimilation of Serbs in Croatia and the persecution of the Serbs in Bosnia and Hercegovina was carried out." Ultimately, "the Albanians...were just more radical and more brutal than our other 'brothers.'" <sup>2</sup> "The 'socialist' nations—Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims—are the product," Ćosić asserted, "of the most reactionary and most insane lies about themselves, about their identities, which never existed in history. The past has been falsified..." Ćosić concluded this lengthy diatribe by proposing that "any future revolution in this country that communist Stalinists ruled needs to [start with] the burning of paper! The burning of all books, all texts and newspapers written by communists and under their rule. The burning of all 'revolutionary' printed texts from the First World War on. We need to begin our literacy anew...from the alphabet of Vuk..."<sup>3</sup> Ćosić never proposed such a thing in public; one is reminded of his call for blood in his anti-peasant passages from the early 1950s, which he did not repeat publicly either.

Instead, as an actively engaged intellectual, Ćosić would spend the latter half of the 1980s trying futilely to find common ground with other Yugoslav nations. He generally ignored the so-called "socialistic nations," the Montenegrins, Macedonians, and Muslims, all attributable in his mind to the initiatives of the Tito regime, without whom they would be Serbs. Instead he preferred to fall back on one of the more pervasive historical truisms about twentieth-century Yugoslavia: the idea that Serbia and Slovenia, Serbs and Slovenes, are the primary axis of stability in the state. When they work together, the truism goes, stability can be maintained. Periodically, we can find examples of such cooperation, and the postwar period was one of regular contact between Serbian and Slovenian intellectuals (in spite of, for instance,



the Ćosić–Pirjevec debate of 1961/62). But one commentator notes that they had “parted ways by the mid-1980s at the latest.”<sup>4</sup>

One early indication that the Slovenes preferred to go it alone was the refusal of Taras Kermauner and his Slovene colleagues to join forces in the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Speech and Expression in 1984. And Slovene intellectuals produced a complement of sorts to the Serbian Memorandum in 1987, with volume 57 of the journal *Nova revija*, entitled “Contributions to a Slovene National Program.”<sup>5</sup> In this volume, Slovene writers asserted in a variety of ways the need for Slovene sovereignty in Yugoslavia. The contributors were contemporaries of Ćosić and his Serbian colleagues—people who had matured under Titoism, but had concluded that with his death Yugoslavia needed to address basic problems. The “Contributions” of these intellectuals responded to “the constant flow from Belgrade of accusations formulated in ethnic terms” with proposals that followed suit, emphasizing Slovenia’s subordinate status in Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup> There was another source of opposition in Slovenia, centered on the Slovene literary and artistic avant-garde, which focused less on ethnic mobilization and created a more civic-minded opposition, but, in the words of Tomaž Mastnak, “under the mounting antidemocratic pressure from the Serbian Yugoslav capital,” Slovenes were forced to adopt Slovenian sovereignty—independence—as a goal. “To a degree, Slovenian politics became the mirror image of Serbian exclusivism.”<sup>7</sup>

Ćosić had a long history of conflict and collaboration with Slovenian intellectuals. The editor of (Niko Grafenauer) and contributors to (Taras Kermauner, Spomenka Hribar, and others) the *Nova revija* symposium were among his friends. The volume upset Ćosić and his Belgrade colleagues, who professed to be shocked by the contributors’ conclusion that Yugoslavia had nothing left to offer Slovenes. They may have been unnerved at the public nature of the volume’s proposals, but they couldn’t have been surprised: Ćosić, Ljubomir Tadić, and Mihailo Marković had met with the editors of *Nova revija* a bit over a year earlier, in Ljubljana, at the urging of Kermauner, to “organize a dialogue between the Serbian and Slovenian oppositions with the goal of creating a unified opposition platform.”<sup>8</sup> The meeting took place on September 16, 1985, in a café called—too appropriately—“Mrak” (darkness). The results discouraged the Serbian participants. According to Ćosić, with the exception of Kermauner,

the Slovenes spoke as one (there were nine of them). The three Serbs allegedly mostly listened. The Slovene position was that "Yugoslavia is historically dead," the only question remaining, "how could we create a new Yugoslavia, if such was possible?" The national question was critical for them. "I am a Slovene," one said. "I am for Yugoslavia only if it enables me to be above all a Slovene." Slovenia was a part of central Europe, but was being pulled away by its obligations in Yugoslavia; "we wish to be Europe; we want Europeanization for Serbia too. We expect Serbia to resist Asiatic totalitarianism." And so on. One might suspect Čosić's recollections of this meeting, were these not all positions publicly taken by Slovenes in succeeding years, if not before. The Serbian response, in Čosić's version, was silence—of the dumbfounded variety: on the bus from Ljubljana to Zagreb, "we were beaten and speechless. We needed three hours before we could speak about the people in 'Mrak' and ask ourselves: Did we hear them right...?...If the Slovene people think like that, or if the Slovene people accept their approach, then Yugoslavia is finished."<sup>9</sup>

In a private response to Grafenauer, written two months later, Čosić laid out some of his differences with the Slovenes he had met.

I was sorry that I did not hear a single word about your economic hegemonism, and fundamentally privileged position in Yugoslavia after 1918, and especially after 1945. I was rather surprised by your underestimation, in my opinion, of the genuine national euphoria...[and] anti-Serbianism that have overcome the youthful depths of the Slovene people....in national ideology, "no" and denial are always a stronger catalyst than "yes" and toleration...

Serbs had no choice but to respond: "as far as contemporary Serbian nationalism is concerned, it was born of defense, as a reaction to existential endangerment..."

I am worried that you do not realize how difficult, unequal, and degrading the position of the Serbian nation is in the existing political constellation of "self-managing Yugoslavia"; how hopeless the position of the Serbian nation is in the third, Brioni Yugoslavia, unless radical constitutional changes and democratic reforms of the entire political and economic order are accomplished as soon

as possible, changes which the Slovenian bureaucratic oligarchy tirelessly opposes, while relying on the anti-Serbian coalition....I am sorry that you are uninformed about the Albanian genocide of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija, how little the Slovenian public has sought the truth about Kosovo, in any case not even as much as we have worried about the Slovenian coast and Koruška...<sup>10</sup>

The die was cast: the next six years would see growing conflict between Serbia and Slovenia, Serbian intellectuals and Slovene intellectuals, none of who could understand the language that the others were speaking. Many Serbs, Ćosić included, interpreted the refusal of the Slovenian communist leadership to prosecute the authors of the texts in *Nova revija* (57) as evidence that the ideas expressed in the journal were endorsed by that leadership. Another Serbian enemy was born, in the "darkness" of a Ljubljana café.

The Slovenian/Serbian dialogue of the deaf continued to the end of Yugoslavia; in fact, it continues to this day.<sup>11</sup> It provided some of the most visible signposts on the road to the wars of the Yugoslav succession beginning in 1991. In 1987, a few months after the publication of the "Contributions to a Slovenian National Program," the UKS sponsored a series of meetings between Serbian and Slovenian intellectuals that revisited the same themes. Here Ćosić credited the Slovenes and Serbs with having had generally good relations throughout their history; however, "along with the dominant tradition which I outlined rather simply and poorly, there is also in Slovene-Serbian relations a tradition of anti-Serbianism linked to militant Catholicism, the Austrian spirit, and the Comintern ideology of the Communist party." By 1987, Ćosić had concluded that "for Slovenes, all evil emanates from Belgrade: economic exploitation, unitarism, centralism, militarism, and the štafeta." Serbs are misunderstood, and Slovenes are indifferent to Serbia's problems, especially in Kosovo. To Serbs, Ćosić insisted that overcoming this isolation, this indifference, demanded of them that they "clearly and loudly express this rational and categorical position: the Serbian question is only a democratic question." Serbs needed to be clear on that point because "anti-democratic and anti-Serbian forces in the national bureaucracies and the publics that they manipulate...demand apriori the existence of Great Serbian national-

ism, unitarism, or centralism.” In other words, the worst thing Serbs could do would be to allow tired old accusations to find traction thanks to any Serbian actions.<sup>12</sup>

### THE CENTRALITY OF KOSOVO

Slovenia mattered to Serbs because without the Slovenes, Serbs were alone in dealing with their real problem, which was Kosovo. By 1987, Kosovo had become the central metaphor for Serbian weakness in Yugoslavia. At a series of UKS meetings entitled “On Kosovo, For Kosovo,” held between May 15 to May 24, 1987, Ćosić delivered one of the most anticipated speeches.<sup>13</sup> It clearly delineated Ćosić’s understanding of Serbia’s subordinate place in Yugoslavia. Kosovo presented Serbia with similar difficulties as “1914, 1915, and 1941.” His presentation then focused on two questions: the nature of the Kosovo problem itself, and the current character of the Serbian nation. Regarding the first issue: “How is it possible that in a European state at the end of the twentieth century...a nationality [Albanian] which by international law has the position of a national minority, in a time of peace, drives from its territory the majority nation in that state in order to conquer Serbian and Yugoslav territory for its home state of Albania?” “How can we solve the Kosovo question in a democratic and civilized fashion, when the Albanian side behaves only with force, antidemocratically and inhumanely, without the voice of historical reason?” Responsibility for this situation, for Ćosić, rested with Serbs. Serbs, by implication a more mature people who are capable of understanding the consequences of their behavior, had to realize that the lowlier Albanians would in fact “do that which they were allowed to do.”

But what was the nature of Serbian responsibility? Here, for Ćosić, things get a bit complicated. Some Serbs deserved blame for their actions, others for their inaction, for the problem was that communism and its corruptions and entitlements drove the evil that was, by 1987, Kosovo. “What sorts of people,” for instance, “headed Serbia and the Serbian communists in the past thirty years and, in their political and moral capitulationism, collaborated in the creation of a Greater Albania, and why did they do this?” “Why,” Ćosić adds, “is the truth about the expulsion of nearly two hundred thousand Serbian souls from Kosovo and Metohija...[considered] an ideological sin...?”

And the final insult: "Why is the Serbian nation today, although in the worst position in Yugoslavia, the nation which is most often distrusted by neighboring nations?" This was for Ćosić all "...a trial in which the Serbian nation will again prove before Europe and the world its historical maturity, level of civilization, democratic potential, and its political vision..." But outsiders must wonder what Ćosić meant by "historical maturity," "level of civilization," and "democratic potential." Ćosić believed that Serbs would exhibit those qualities not in dealing with Albanians but in healing divisions among themselves and between themselves and the other constituent nations of Yugoslavia—the Slovenes and Croats, primarily—in finding a solution to the Kosovo problem. Like other Serbian opponents of Titoism, Ćosić had internalized the Titoist lexicon in national relations, which delineated "nations" and "nationalities," the former constituent peoples with full rights and privileges, the latter less privileged legally, morally privileged by the fact that they were allowed to inhabit Yugoslav soil. Albanians, just a "nationality" in Titoist terminology that Ćosić otherwise rejected, were only as vital to this struggle as any other inanimate objects; neither Ćosić nor any other Serbian observers ever felt much of a compunction to deal with the Albanians in Kosovo democratically, because their legal status did not merit such treatment.

No, maturity was called for only in relations with the other five constituent nations of Yugoslavia (Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Muslim Slavs). Ćosić believed that the leaders of other Yugoslav nations acted out of self-interest, and in the worst cases with conscious malice towards Serbs: he would again describe Yugoslavia as being led by an "anti-Serbian coalition" that would have to be replaced by a "democratic federation" for any progress to be made in Kosovo or for Serbs in general. But Ćosić always took for granted the hostility of non-Serbs for Serbs. More important than that hostility was the fact that Serbs themselves were to be blamed for their situation, for having let down their guard and allowed such a situation to develop in the first place, resulting in a tragically divided nation. Thus, a second way that their historical maturity and democratic potential would be put to use was internally, in relations between Serbs who were fatally divided along axes established by the Tito regime. Here Ćosić was consistent as of the mid-1980s, expanding on themes first introduced in his earlier novels. He described a process by

which Serbian Partisans fought for the best of reasons; they took power with a pure vision of a “happy future”; power corrupted some of them, while others resisted the temptations of power, and divisions resulted; by the end of this sordid story, Serbs could only blame themselves for having embraced Tito as a representative of socialism, for having surrendered their national identity in the interests of general good, and for not having respected their own history, which revealed patterns of such behavior (along the moral-historical continuum of idealism—self-sacrifice – betrayal – corruption).

Perhaps the most complete rendering of Ćosić’s narrative of Serbian self-destruction and self-delusion came in a piece that he wrote for *Književne novine* in 1988, as part of that journal’s forty-year anniversary: noting that he and *Književne novine* were the same age in literary terms, he briefly sketched out the period of their shared existence. “The generation to which I belong was historically and fatefully defined by the war and our divisions in it...”<sup>14</sup> The end of the war brought euphoria: it “did not mean only liberation and peace; for us it represented the beginning of a ‘happy future.’” But the “happy future” was not all that happy—its construction, Ćosić asserted, demanded the manufacture of heretics and enemies and the fighting of a “brutal civil war in which heads were chopped off and souls were crushed.” After all of that idealism and violence, “it is time for the truth about ourselves, about those of us who tried to create a new society and found a ‘happy future’ for the nation and the people on our soil...” The legacy of the war and its aftermath was, for Ćosić, mixed: “our greatest historical achievement was the victory in the war and the conquest of power”; “in peace...we did not accomplish a single great task...that would outlive us.” For his generation, “self-confidence was more powerful than knowledge, egoism than ideals and morals, civil cowardice than national dignity.” As Serbs could blame only themselves for their failures, so they could find renewal only from within. Ćosić’s monologue was not one of unmitigated pessimism: “As it always happens in such historical trials and challenges, the time of the brave and intelligent has begun, of the gifted and honorable....[possibilities for change] appear along with the moral and intellectual readiness and courage for a great renaissance.”

Kosovo brought all of Ćosić’s themes together. If the reason for the creation of Yugoslavia was to provide a home in which the South Slavs could exist in harmony, then Kosovo was a problem which could

prove the experiment untenable: "The solution to the Kosovo question is the new historical confirmation of the reasons and the sense of the existence of Yugoslavia...because in Kosovo, Kosovo does not fall; Yugoslavia falls."<sup>15</sup> If Yugoslavia's imminent failure was a product of the inadequacies (utopianism, self-sacrifice) of the Serbian people, then Kosovo brought those failures home: "All that has happened in recent decades with the Serbian nation in Kosovo and Metohija...was made possible by the spiritual and moral division which has deeply driven into and taken over today's generation..." Kosovo revealed the historical depth of those moral divisions: Serbia frankly embodied a "tradition of faithlessness and treason." "Kosovo is not the final temptation of our nation, but Kosovo is the final warning." "Our greatest enemy," Ćosić wrote, "is within us."

Ćosić was not tempted to relate Serbia's degradation to the historical Kosovo mythology, as seductive as that was to other Serbian intellectuals. It was for him a product of the twentieth century. Serbian self-sacrifice during and after the First World War set the stage. After that war, believing that they had fought for the liberation of the South Slavs, understanding that their sacrifices entailed the subsuming of their own historically Serbian identity, Serbs endured constant conflict. "Since 1918, on the soil of Yugoslavia, there has been permanent civil war. Immediately after unification, the Croats began a civil war, and the communists, nationalists, all of those dissatisfied with the kingdom joined them. The political civil war became an armed civil war in 1941, with Ustaša genocide." After the Second World War, "civil war smoldered, blazed up, quieted, but was never extinguished; it has the same primary focus, the same motivations: the national dissatisfactions with the state organization and with Yugoslavia as such."<sup>16</sup> Serbs, who sacrificed their identity for the new state that none of the other peoples appreciated, suffered as the primary natural antagonist for those dissatisfied nationalists. The ultimate insult for Ćosić, though, was the fact that after so much self-sacrifice in the name of a higher purpose—a "happy future"—Serbs were not only the objects of hatred of other Yugoslav nations, but the objects of open hostility from the regime that they had so idealistically supported.

As a symbol of Ćosić's increasing relevance, on September 15, 1987, *Književne novine* published his 1968 speech to the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Serbian League of Commun-

ists.<sup>17</sup> While the speech had long circulated in Serbian and Yugoslav society (it had been published in *The Real and the Possible* as early as 1983), its appearance in the leading literary journal in Serbia signified that the author had now re-emerged as a public figure, no longer the outsider he had been since the end of his tenure at the Serbian Literary Guild in 1972. Milorad Vučelić, the editor of *Književne novine*, wrote an accompanying article in which he argued that the speech had long been demonized as nationalistic, when it was really just “an expression of foresight” and not an anti-Albanian treatise.<sup>18</sup> The change in Ćosić’s status was subtle at best. He had never been forbidden to publish his novels or his essays. Ćosić and the UKS had been the locus of opposition activity in Serbia since 1981, although they had not really teamed up in that regard: while Francuska 7 had been the scene of regular protest evenings since 1983, Ćosić had worked via the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression, which was not technically a UKS initiative. Now, though, Ćosić would become the leading figure in the UKS and a fixture on the pages of *Književne novine*, its official organ.

#### YUGOSLAV CAINS

Ćosić’s influence derived not only from his literary stature and his early predictions regarding Kosovo—it also derived from a carefully crafted mea culpa, begun with *Time of Evil* and now continued in public presentations and especially interviews. In the late 1980s, Ćosić became the single most important point of reference for journalists describing the tumultuous events of that era. He was more than willing to elaborate his simple thesis that communism’s fundamental divisiveness had corrupted Serbia’s spirit. As we know, integral to Ćosić’s explanation of Serbia’s failure was a discussion of his own seduction by Titoism. After all, he had been one of those intellectuals who embraced the promise of the “happy future.” His understanding of Serbia’s poor position in Yugoslavia mirrored his description of his own progress as a communist intellectual; his behavior, and his diagnosis of Serbia’s problems, demanded an explanation from him. He had to pay a debt to Serbia for his prior service to the fratricidal Titoist/communist ideology. In part, he would pay that debt by putting to use his intimate knowledge of Titoist mechanisms of power to identify those people



and things which served fratricidalism. In other words, he would offer up heroes and traitors to the Serbian historical cause.

In his fratricidal Serbia, Ćosić gladly identified those guilty of the basest betrayal. In various lectures and interviews in the late 1980s, especially in two books by Slavoljub Djukić,<sup>19</sup> he established a basic litmus test: if one had acquiesced in the gradual creation of semi-sovereign republics and provinces in Yugoslavia, one was a traitor to the Serbian people. Those people acted within a framework first elaborated by the late and unlamented Habsburg monarchy. In his famous speech to the Serbian Academy in 1977, Ćosić included Austria-Hungary in a list of perpetrators of genocide against the Serbs.<sup>20</sup> A rather alarming claim in any context, it is especially startling to find it at such an early date.<sup>21</sup> His accusation in 1977 laid the foundation for subsequent portrayals of the Austrian dynasty as fundamentally anti-Serbian. Ćosić was never particularly specific about the nature of Habsburg genocide. It may have been the simple fact of World War I—*Time of Death* would argue that the war Austria fought against Serbia was inhumane and undeserved at best. But presumably he also referred to the fact that the Habsburg monarchy had created persistent borders between communities of Orthodox Christian Serbs: Bosnia, Vojvodina, Croatia, Dalmatia. The Habsburgs of course had worked mightily before 1914 to contain Serbian nationalism and the connections between Serbs of Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia itself. But now, their crimes could be systematized as part of a broader historical process of persecution of Serbs (and so they were, not just by Ćosić but also by historians like Vasilije Krestić and Dragoljub Živojinović). The Habsburgs had engaged in “divide and rule” policies in order to control Serbs and, although Ćosić did not appreciate this detail, Croats, and the fact that Serbs often abetted that process only aided Ćosić’s analysis, which relied on the existence of Serbs who would betray their nation. The other noteworthy foreign enemy of Serbs was the international communist movement, in the form of the Comintern and the Bolsheviks, which had, according to Ćosić, used the Habsburg approach as its own template. Ćosić blamed the Communist International for its interwar policy of supporting national movements as revolutionary movements and for labeling the Serbian monarchy and the Serbian bourgeoisie as the primary culprits inhibiting progress in Yugoslavia. According to Ćosić, Tito utilized the same images of Serbia.

After the Second World War, Tito, a Stalinist, had allegedly crushed national sentiment in Serbia while fostering it elsewhere (Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia). The shared crime of the Habsburgs and the Bolsheviks was to have sown divisions between South Slavs and among Serbs: they played upon the divisiveness of Serbs to find collaborators; they capitalized on the divisiveness of South Slavs, and especially hostility towards Serbs, to keep Serbia fragmented; all of this founded on their intense hatred of Serbs. The ease with which Ćosić not only integrated the Habsburgs and the Comintern into the pantheon of Serbia's historic enemies, but even equated them, was rather stunning. "The FNRJ: that is the Comintern, Tito's Yugoslavia, created or finally constituted with maximal respect for Austro-Hungarian ideology in the Balkans. The entire territorial structure of the FNRJ, that is the prewar organization of the KPJ, was founded on Austro-Hungarian administrative formations..."<sup>22</sup> The simplest expression of this would be a common sort of portrayal of Tito among Serbs in the 1980s and 1990s: Tito, a bolshevik, a stalinist, was also half-Croat, half-Slovene, and his tactics harkened back to those of Franz Joseph. How, Vuk Drašković (one of Ćosić's many heirs) later asked, could Tito help but be a Serbophobe?

Raised in school and in childhood on official serbophobia, as an Austrian soldier sent to the front in 1914 against *schismatic and hegemonistic Serbia*, and later, as a communist and prospective cadre of the Comintern, given the opportunity anew to listen to the serbophobic lectures of his youth—such a Josip Broz, nonetheless, grew into a great Yugoslav, and perhaps it is improper to doubt the decency of all of his intentions. He probably never freed himself of the virus of serbophobia, but was it—one asks oneself—possible for him to forget overnight that which he was taught for the first fifty years of his life?<sup>23</sup>

Ćosić's construction was adopted by others as well. For instance, in his intriguing anatomy of Titoism, entitled *Tito—The Technology of Power*,<sup>24</sup> Kosta Čavoški describes the methods Tito used to play brotherly nations off of each other. Čavoški explicitly acknowledges Ćosić's influence, thanking Ćosić for reminding him "that the KPJ and Tito formulated the Serbian national question in the same way that the former

Austria-Hungary, and then the Austro-Marxists, did.”<sup>25</sup> This “way” was simple: divide and rule. Serbs suffered under Habsburg and communist rule as a result of the latter’s shared policy of treating Serbs as pawns in a manipulative game of geopolitical chess. Čavoški was right to thank Ćosić, who indeed had bequeathed that simplistic narrative to the Serbian intelligentsia, which embraced it and gave it life.

Outsiders provided the forms, insiders the content, for Tito relied on the enemies within to execute his nefarious plans. Although Ćosić’s ultimate condemnation for policies dividing Serbia would be reserved for Tito (that “Stalinist, tyrant, power-lover, hedonist, merciless and corrupt demagogue, skilled tactician...that status-seeker, ignoramus, careerist, unprincipled statesman...bureaucratic monarch...”<sup>26</sup>) and Edvard Kardelj<sup>27</sup>—a Slovene who was the only one of Tito’s three lieutenants (the others were Djilas and Ranković) to survive politically, he spotted the willingness to destroy Serbia even among Serbs themselves. Those Serbs who favored or acquiesced in the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, including the potential achievement of full republic status by Vojvodina and Kosovo, were for Ćosić Tito’s lackeys. They were supporters of *srbijanstvo*, which in the Serbian language refers to a Serbianism that reduces Serbia to a place south of the Danube and east of the Drina (thus, not including the Serbian communities of Croatia, Bosnia, and Vojvodina). Those Serbs who were willing to support such a narrow vision of Serbian interests were for Ćosić perpetrators of “that shameful cadre and personal policy that follows provincial affinities and criteria”—that is, nepotistic, narrow-minded, corrupt.<sup>28</sup> Since Yugoslavia’s federal structure after 1974 reinforced precisely that narrow *srbijanstvo*, Ćosić identified those who favored the federalization of Yugoslavia as traitors to the Serbian community.

On the individual level, those Serbian communists who survived the tumultuous years of 1966 (when Ranković was removed) and 1972 (when Tito purged the remainder of the Serbian party), and were in power in 1974 (when the 1974 constitution federalizing the state was proclaimed), come in for Ćosić’s harshest condemnations, because those were the years in which Serbia’s divided fate was finalized. In his view, “mediocrity and political cowardice” defined them.<sup>29</sup> Here Ćosić would again affirm his love of the historical metaphor: the vast majority of Serbian communist leaders after 1974 were, for Ćosić, inheritors of the mantle of Prince Miloš Obrenović, whom many Serbs, including

Ćosić, liked to compare unfavorably to his revolutionary rival Djordje Petrović (Karadjordje).

In Serbian history, as you know, there exist two fundamental, I would say antipodal types, which are symbolically represented in prince Miloš and Karadjordje. Prince Djordje was a representative of the rebellious, epic, liberational, revolutionary tradition. Prince Miloš represents politics as skill, which begins with despot Stefan and finishes, I hope, with Petar Stambolić and Dragoslav Marković, not to mention many other Serbian communist “luminaries”...<sup>30</sup>

Since the skilled Miloš had the freedom-seeking Karadjordje executed in 1817, the purpose of the image is clear—Serbia is plagued by amoral masters who are always ready sacrifice Serbia’s true revolutionaries. Post-1974 Serbian leaders, including Petar Stambolić, Draža Marković, Miloš Minić, Tihomir Vlaškalić, and Dušan Petrović Šane, Ćosić believed, were interested in power only for the sake of power, even at the expense of the heirs of Karadjordje. Stambolić (“the prince of Serbian bureaucracy,” “after King Milutin, the longest serving Serbian ruler”<sup>31</sup>) symbolized “the political and moral ruin of the revolutionary movement and the Serbian nation.”<sup>32</sup> Marković was “a representative of the negative in Serbian political tradition, that ‘marketplace Serbia’...of which I am ashamed.”<sup>33</sup> Vlaškalić reflected Tito’s “unerring talent for finding political lackeys.”<sup>34</sup> These men, nearly universally loathed in Serbia after 1980, were guilty of working with rather than against the federalization of Yugoslavia, and there is little doubt that they were above all political survivors. But for Ćosić they reflected timeless divisions in Serbian society, by contributing to a plot drawn up on high to fragment Serbia and create small states within Yugoslavia’s borders, leaving ordinary Serbs in a state of slack-jawed depression (just look at Mica Popović’s *Serbs in a Waiting Room*, which captures the essence of Ćosić’s vision of modern Serbs). When Stambolić, Marković, Vlaškalić, Petrović, and others collaborated with Tito and Kardelj, in Ćosić’s mind they worked for the destruction of Yugoslavia and Serbia.

As Ćosić established his enemies list, he also built a list of modern Serbian heroes, victims of Titoism, whose only unifying features

were that they were Serbs and had fallen from grace. For instance, he idealized and personally rehabilitated Aleksandar Ranković. Similarly, Ćosić would praise Blagoje Nešković, who was removed from the politburo of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1949 under accusations of Stalinism, and Slobodan Penezić Krcun, a regime watchdog whose reputation as a defender of Serbian interests grew posthumously (he died in 1964 in an automobile accident).<sup>35</sup> But Ranković must appear at the head of Ćosić's list, as he has long been the subject of polarized opinion in Yugoslavia. Ranković is hard to picture as a victim of Titoism, given the fact that he was the head of state security after the liberation of Belgrade in October 1944 and thus responsible for the purge of Stalinists and others after 1948, the prison camp for "cominformists" on Goli Otok, and the suppression of dissent in general in Yugoslavia. However, by the early 1980s, Ranković had become a *cause celebre* for anti-Titoists. As Ćosić himself noted, Ranković's funeral in August 1983 was "above all a nationalist demonstration. It was a true, widely effective gesture, a real nationalist uprising [of] solidarity with a noted Serbian communist who was the victim of a great injustice."<sup>36</sup> The question that begs an answer: where is the injustice? Why was Ranković's demise not just another round in the bolshevik game he was playing?

There are a couple of legitimate reasons why Ranković's demotion was perceived by many Serbs as more than just a bolshevik hatchet job. First, the regime linked Ranković to interwar Serbian "hegemonism," which was an integral part of the Yugoslav communists' attack on the interwar Serbian monarchy. At the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, convened after the Brioni Plenum which saw the demotion of Ranković, Dušan Petrović Šane remarked that "Ranković and his group are...a living example of the hegemonistic tendencies which they tried to bring to life in Serbia."<sup>37</sup> When another Serbian communist (allegedly) announced to the central committee of the Serbian League of Communists following Ranković's fall that he was "ashamed to be a Serb," he (apocryphally but usefully) revived language used to blacken the reputation of interwar Serbia: that the Serbian bourgeoisie and the Serbian monarchy had behaved shamefully in the interwar period.<sup>38</sup> Second, as we have seen with the cases of Kosovo, Bosnia, and Croatia, the demotion of Ranković initiated a period of real, profound change in Yugoslavia,

which could also be viewed as anti-Serbian. Ranković, demonized by those whom Ćosić labeled lackeys of an anti-Serbian regime, later prospered as a result of his alleged resistance to the federalization of Serbia, but also, importantly, because of his very demonization. He played the heroic Karadjordje to Tito's miserable Miloš.

As Ćosić progressively concluded that Tito was fundamentally anti-Serbian (by 1980 he was "the greatest enemy of my people in the last century"<sup>39</sup>), he found ever more noble qualities in Ranković. In 1988, Ćosić asserted that he "had never heard anyone accuse [Ranković] of injustice, of vengefulness, of playing personalities, of moral dishonor."<sup>40</sup> Further, this coarse revolutionary, the head of UDBa, the state security service, had a special place in his heart for writers, personally saving some authors from imprisonment and authorizing others' publications (as Ćosić's interviewer noted, "such breadth is not often included in the typical picture of the chief of police and organizational secretary").<sup>41</sup> Ranković, according to Ćosić, was only fully understood by the Serbian peasant. "While the intellectuals and the entire party bureaucracy believed that it was good that Ranković fell, the peasants saw in him a man who defended Yugoslavia and represented Serbia at the head of the party, convinced that he was an honorable and statesmanlike man."<sup>42</sup> Ranković was bad, according to Ćosić, but "no more cruel or merciless than Tito, Kardelj, Djilas, Kidrič, Blaže Jovanović..."<sup>43</sup> Ćosić's view was not entirely clouded—he recognized that ideology could not "justify the many, many evils which we committed 'in the name of good.' Among the first to submit to that judgment, that responsibility, is Aleksandar Ranković. But the tragedy of his fate will remain to writers and philosophers to interpret."<sup>44</sup> Ćosić, writer and occasional philosopher, seeker of transcendent truths, determined that Ranković's fate was an injustice. His attitude to Ranković was founded upon his dual understanding of the function of "division" in Serbia: Ranković resisted Serbia's geopolitical division, and Ranković was cast out of Tito's brotherhood, fratricidally.

With his diagnosis of Serbia's and Yugoslavia's problems firmly established, Ćosić could proceed accordingly, applying that diagnosis to new problems and changes as they occurred in the late 1980s, which was a period of constant turmoil in Yugoslavia. While Serbia simmered under the influence of events in Kosovo and the intellectuals' embrace of the free speech movement, other republics began to respond.

Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia remained quiet until 1990; Slovenia, however, had enjoyed a renaissance of sorts itself—one which paralleled that in Serbia, but differed from it in important ways. Slovenes did not face the critical problem confronting the Serbian intelligentsia: the dispersion of the Serbian people in many of Yugoslavia's federal units. Slovenia was virtually homogenously Slovenian (90 percent in 1981<sup>45</sup>).

By 1987, “anti-Serbianism” and “serbophobia” had become standards in Ćosić's vocabulary: they were a fundamental feature of life in Yugoslavia. Characteristically, Ćosić believed that Serbs had contributed to the flourishing of serbophobia, but not because Serbs had behaved aggressively or done anything legitimately to be feared by other Yugoslavs.

[Serbs contributed to serbophobia] very much. Above all with our state-creating Yugoslavism. In the name of Comintern internationalism, we denied ourselves our Serbian identity. Communists from other Yugoslav nations, in the name of that internationalism, defended their national interests, and, especially in recent decades, only strengthened their nations. Inheriting the complex guilt of the so-called governing nation, we never had the daring to speak the real truth about international relations in economics, politics, or the spiritual sphere. While in Croatia and Slovenia they have spoken for decades of the theft that is undertaken by Belgrade, official Serbian policy, the Serbian government, never said a word of truth about that. It agreed to a lie. That Serbian “open-heartedness” was political stupidity; such Serbian Yugoslavism was the worst Yugoslavism. With that we objectively provided a foundation for Serbophobia.<sup>46</sup>

The fundamental sin of the Serbs was that they had so closely associated themselves with a state and an ideology that had come to be loathed by others. Yugoslavism, embraced by Serbs because of its idealistic potential and because it brought Serbian unity, had planted the seeds of its own destruction by ultimately encouraging other nations to affirm themselves. Thus, Serbs were duped. “Serbophobia” emerged as a result of their embrace of Titoist Yugoslavism. This would be a tragic process, did it not thoroughly underestimate the maturity of

Slovenes, Croats, Macedonians, and others, who in Ćosić's scheme emerge as peoples who act formulaically, according to a script in which they are written in as, at best, fundamentally hostile to Serbs. All Serbs could have done was to have recognized their own need for self-defense sooner; instead, in their graciousness, they had denied themselves their identity and opened themselves to the hostility that lied in wait for them.

### ĆOSIĆ AND MILOŠEVIĆ

In 1990, Ćosić articulated a thought that had been on the tip of his tongue for several years. He drew upon the words of Njegoš: "our greatest evil is within ourselves, our greatest enemy is among us. Thus we cannot postpone the struggle with ourselves and with our own.... The future of the Serbian nation is decisively dependent on the conquering of the evil within it." To overcome that evil, he called for a full national revival:

Today, nothing meaningful and great can be done in this country if we do not experience a spiritual renaissance. And it begins with the selection of those national traditions which have the energy for a new era and the establishment of a hierarchy of lasting values in the individual and in society. Given that assumption, it is also reasonable to affirm in the ethos of our culture the courage to find the truth, above all about ourselves, and to push away with the spirit of tolerance...the passion for division and conflict..<sup>47</sup>

Ćosić's call to renewal included extraordinarily few specific suggestions—his task, as he would later put it, was to "serve my people...as a writer...by speaking some truth about its existence..."<sup>48</sup>; his people should rediscover their own values and, apparently, find their own way. However, one thing that he clearly believed was needed was a leader: "A characteristic of all national movements is the appearance of national leaders." An apparent answer to his call emerged after April 24, 1987, when Slobodan Milošević, the chairman of the League of Communists of Serbia, gave an apparently impromptu speech to Serbian demonstrators in the town of Kosovo Polje. In that speech, he infamously declared that no one "dared" beat them (as Serbian oppo-



nents of the current order in Kosovo, these demonstrators represented the oppressed, not the ruling, nation in Kosovo). The speech elevated Milošević above the run-of-the-mill bureaucrats that headed the League of Communists of Serbia. By December of 1987, capitalizing on his newfound role as defender of Serbian interests, Milošević had engineered the LCS's repudiation of Serbian President Ivan Stambolić, who was Petar's nephew and Milošević's own political patron, and his own installation as president of the republic.

Ćosić claims to have been cautiously optimistic at the rise of Milošević. The mere fact that the post-1974 Serbian party leaders had left the stage was cause for elation: "the worst political tradition of the Serbian people—radical politics, love of power, nepotism, careerism, the political vassalism of [that tradition's] brilliant founder Miloš Obrenović, through to the prince of contemporary Serbian bureaucracy Petar Stambolić—were defeated."<sup>49</sup> While acknowledging that Milošević overthrew Stambolić using "traditional communistic and titoistic methods" (akin to those which undid Aleksandar Ranković),<sup>50</sup> Ćosić also believed that Milošević made his bureaucratic position as Serbian president more meaningful through his own "abilities and charisma as a leader": "the party did not make Milošević the Serbian leader, nor did socialist ideology; only the nation's energy and [his] statesmanship could have made him such."<sup>51</sup> Milošević alone would determine if he would remain a national leader or merely the leader of a Serbian party. If the latter, "then he will only be a comet whose appearance and passing in the heavens of Serbian history will be remembered for a short time."<sup>52</sup> To be a national leader would mean subsuming his own ambitions in the interest of "the defense of Serbs and the renewal of the modern Serbian state." If he did so, he would "achieve the reputation and meaning which no one among the Serbs has had since Pašić."

When, during 1988 and 1989, Milošević sponsored the so-called "yoghurt revolution" that toppled the leaderships of Montenegro and Vojvodina, Ćosić applauded: "I must admit that I am very happy that I lived through a true people's revolution, which, as far as I know, given its lack of violence, is singular in the postwar history of Europe. It is unheard of that a bureaucratic government, such as that in the Vojvodina, could be overthrown with some yoghurt and three broken windows....For the first time, as far as I know, a CP has accept-

ed the demands of the masses. That is to Milošević's political credit and his innovation, pray God it is not a manipulation."<sup>53</sup> As it turned out, of course, it was indeed a manipulation. Ćosić's tenuous embrace of Milošević was a product of two qualities: his blind hatred of the bureaucratic party, whose existence he had bemoaned since the early 1960s, and Milošević's embrace of Kosovo as a symbol of the oppression of Serbs in Tito's Yugoslavia. In September 1989, he gave Milošević some qualified public support:

I do not know him personally. He is young, brave, decisive and intelligent. He speaks well. He has an exceptional ability to communicate with the masses. He is undoubtedly the most popular person the Serbian people have had in the twentieth century. He does not fear the opposition and gave it the possibility to destroy Titoism. Since he left the party to take power, he has initiated a new political discussion and given more space for confrontation. Djilas can now say what he likes. Even on television. I repeat that he has no ambitions to become the new Tito. Finally, my opinion of Milošević: it is too early to be enthused by him, but it is also too early to judge him negatively.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps as important was the fact that, as he wrote in his diary two months later, Milošević "is the first party functionary in Serbia who has given principled support to the Academy and to Francuska 7!"<sup>55</sup>

Others shared Ćosić's optimism. Milovan Đanojlić, one of the original members of the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom, wrote in November 1988 that Serbs, whose "strong personalities in the party and the government (Žujović, Djilas, Ranković, Nešković, Nikezić, Koča Popović) were thrown into disfavor," had embraced Milošević for various reasons, not least because he had "called to the people for help." The Serbia intelligentsia waited nervously but hopefully. "The number of banned books and criminal prosecutions of 'thought crime'" had "fallen notably....in some Belgrade bookstores I saw books...in which the method by which Milošević came to power was mercilessly attacked. The atmosphere is *de facto* liberal..."<sup>56</sup> These were all reasons to rejoice, but Đanojlić was certain to note that he was not sure whether this "liberal" atmosphere was a result of Milošević's inclinations or momentary political needs.

Unlike some Serbian intellectual leaders (Antonije Isaković and Mihailo Marković, for instance), Ćosić had no personal contact with Milošević until the beginning of 1990.<sup>57</sup> While Ćosić claims never to have chosen to work with the ruling party, he did offer very public signs of his approval of Milošević. For instance, on July 16, 1990, the Socialist Party of Serbia held its founding congress (this was the renamed Serbian League of Communists), which he attended together with Antonije Isaković and Brana Crnčević. While he insists that he was merely an interested outsider, he was photographed meeting with Milošević, which sent Serbs a clear message of approval of the regime.<sup>58</sup> Soon thereafter, Ćosić did provide Milošević one service that has resounded in Serbia ever since: at a time when political discourse was focused on the issue of a new constitution for Serbia, Ćosić publicly rejected opposition calls for the election of a constituent assembly, instead arguing that the current (Milošević) government of Serbia should formulate the new constitution.<sup>59</sup> His voice was authoritative enough that his argument, which included some desultory remarks regarding the newly formed opposition parties, carried the day and Milošević was able to create a constitution to his liking.<sup>60</sup>

The constitutional question—the *Yugoslav* constitutional question until 1990—had of course been one of the more prominent ones on the minds of oppositionists in Serbia for several years. Ćosić, in fact, had presided over the formulation of a UKS proposal as early as March 28, 1988. Titled “Contribution to Public Debate on the Constitution,” it demanded an end to the party monopoly in political life in Yugoslavia, direct voting, freedom of the press, a right to privacy, an independent judiciary, the right to private property, the establishment of the “national, spiritual, and cultural integrity of each Yugoslav nation individually, independently of republics or regions in which they lie,” and a Serbia which “has the same rights and duties which other republics which comprise the Yugoslav state association possess.”<sup>61</sup> A year and a half later, in entirely different conditions, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Matija Bećković, and Mića Popović together issued a “Public Demand” Jan. 1, 1990, in which they called for a constitutional convention to be elected within six months, which they argued necessitated the formation of political parties, an end leading role of party; an end to communist organizations in the army, police, businesses, and institutions; an end to public financing of the League of Communists; equal treatment in me-

dia of all parties; no more protection of the person and works of Tito; and full freedom of press.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, Ćosić acted as though these debates had not occurred. "I fooled myself and was fooled by them," he said. "I had then information that the Slovenes and Albanians were preparing declarations on secession, which was accurate, and I thought that we must hurry to carry a new constitution that would put Serbia in a better position. And I said then: first the Constitution, by which I understood the participation of opposition parties in its creation. That was the agreement with Milošević but he did not keep his promise."<sup>63</sup> And, whatever his true relationship with Milošević, he did ultimately vote for him in Serbia's first post-communist presidential election in December 1990: "In spite of all the good intentions of Ante Marković, no reform was possible on the ruins of Brioni Yugoslavia." "In that competition, I vote for Milošević."<sup>64</sup>

Real political initiatives are not a large part of Ćosić's record, but he was undoubtedly instrumental in the choices of Jovan Rašković and Radovan Karadžić to lead the Serbian Democratic parties of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, respectively.<sup>65</sup> Rašković was an old friend; they had met in the mid-1960s and regularly vacationed together thereafter. There is no indication that Karadžić and Ćosić were friends before 1990, but Ćosić nonetheless felt comfortable in anointing him the leader of Bosnia's Serbs: "with his intelligence, decisiveness, and militance, he was the right person to lead the Bosnian Serbs."<sup>66</sup> On Nov. 2, 1990, the SDS BiH met at Sava Centar in Belgrade. Ćosić gave the opening speech. "Here among us in Belgrade are our own representatives of the Serbian Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which denotes the beginning of the spiritual and political renaissance of the Serbian nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, till yesterday the *raja* of Tito's *vezirs*..." As evidence of (at the very least) Ćosić's poor judgment of character, he continued by announcing that he was

convinced that the SDS BiH seeks...the creation of a democratic and educated society in which tolerance of difference and respect for national, spiritual, and religious identities of the Muslims, Croats, and all nationalities and confessions—is a fundamental principle of its politics, with brotherly desires and hope in the success of the historical mission of the SDS, I welcome its leadership and membership.<sup>67</sup>

Disappointment awaited on all fronts. The student demonstrations of March 9, 1991 disillusioned Ćosić and many others among Serbia's intellectual supporters of the regime. The demonstrations were led by the Serbian Renewal Movement and its leader Vuk Drašković, with the goal of loosening SPS control of the media in Serbia. The regime's response was swift and violent; Drašković was arrested and beaten, and students and others fought the police and military on the streets of downtown Belgrade. Among others, Mihiz, whose initial fondness for Milošević had by now disappeared, spoke to the demonstrators. The mere fact that the Serbian army was brought out to fight against Serbs, at a time when most Serbs believed they were threatened by Albanian, Croatian, and Slovenian actions, contributed to their disillusionment. Ćosić, who condemned the brutality of the Serbian regime, nevertheless retained some respect for Milošević. In September, after the war in Slovenia had concluded but that in Croatia raged, he told the daily *Politika* that

...I believe that after Nikola Pašić, in the First World War, no politician has had more difficult conditions and more worries than Slobodan Milošević. He bravely attended the renewal of the Serbian state and the salvation of the Serbian nation from a new enslavement and destruction, to that end confronting many and more powerful enemies and obstacles....Slobodan Milošević, has in my opinion, of all Serbian politicians in the last five decades done the most for the Serbian nation. His general national policy, strategy, and tactics, I believe are realistic and well directed.<sup>68</sup>

By May 1992, Ćosić would become disappointed in yet another leader of the new Serbia, Radovan Karadžić. Noting that he was in daily contact with Karadžić during those first two months of the Bosnian war, Ćosić remembers asking him "Why the destruction of Sarajevo? What's with that Serbian foolishness against the entire world? That represents the final collapse of the Serbian question."<sup>69</sup> If Ćosić's response to the actions of his man Karadžić seem to be very little and very late, they could not keep him from succumbing to the final seduction for the writer who proposes to be seen as the voice of his nation: on June 15, 1992, Ćosić became the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. He lasted until the end of May, 1993, when he was

forced from his position by a coalition of Socialist and Radical party representatives in the federal assembly. His time as president saw him futilely working to improve Serbia's image abroad; in fact, this was the function that Milošević imagined for him when he became president. When Ćosić began to push Milošević rather than to follow him, his fate was sealed. It was a political performance more than worthy of a man who professed never to want to be involved in politics. It also marked the end of Ćosić's public life.

### THE SIMINOVCI RETURN

While Ćosić had achieved a preeminent position among Serbian intellectual oppositionists, his Simina 9a friends had also re-emerged on the public scene. Where the catalog for Mića Popović's 1974 exhibition had established the very notion that there had been such a thing as a Simina 9a collective, other sources now reinforced the idea. In Slavoljub Djukić's book of interviews with Ćosić, *A Man in his Times: Conversations with Dobrica Ćosić*, published in 1989, Simina 9a gained its own chapter.<sup>70</sup> At the same point, the new newsmagazine *Intervju* devoted several issues to the rehabilitation of Mihailo Djurić at the time that his issue—the constitution of Serbia and Yugoslavia—had begun to truly obsess ordinary Serbs (with the encouragement of the regime-controlled press, of course).<sup>71</sup> It is only a slight exaggeration to say that *Intervju* served as the siminovci's vehicle for personal rehabilitation. Pavle Ivić became a prime source for language politics and the Serbian question in Croatia; Stojković's "heroic" publication of the works of Dragisa Vasić and Slobodan Jovanović earned him a special role. The magazine turned regularly to all of them, plus Mihiz, for commentary on the Serbian dilemma.

Mihiz played a prominent, but not leading, role in the deliberations of the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression. He contributed to the writing of The "Proposal for the Free and Critical Reinvestigation of the Historical Role of Josip Broz Tito," issued in June 1988, whose primary authors were Čavoški and Koštunica.<sup>72</sup> He was elected vice-president of the UKS in 1988–90; Matija Bećković was elected president.<sup>73</sup> He was the author of "Serbia and Democracy, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" which was a product of the UKS, in May 1989. This document, prepared as oppo-

sition and public demands for governmental reforms grew in strength, laid out a case for Serbia's democratic heritage. It detailed the history of Serbian unification in the nineteenth century, and emphasized the argument that democracy in Serbia and Yugoslavia only began to founder after Serbia magnanimously fought for the freedom of others as well. Now,

after forty five years of uninterrupted control by one party, the country finds itself on the brink of economic collapse and at one of the lowest levels of economic development in Europe, mired in extremely dangerous national conflicts, without prospects for development and progress, as a terminally ill patient of the contemporary world. One of the essential factors and causes of the general Yugoslav crisis has been the long-term absence of democratic freedoms and rights.<sup>74</sup>

Mihiz describes the problem for Yugoslavia at that point as a conflict between two concepts of democracy, one which believes in the principle "one-man-one-vote," and the other which would restrict that principle and funnel democratic impulses through the republics.<sup>75</sup>

Ultimately, Mihiz's own logic led him to the conclusion that "a free Yugoslavia is impossible," which he expressed in an interview published by *Intervju* in October 1990. "The second that democracy brings the right of self-determination," he argues, "Yugoslavia is finished. The Croats and Slovenes want their independent states, which is their uncontestable right. It would be good if Serbs finally figured that out." His obvious conclusion: "that the Serbian national program must have as its first point the creation of an independent and free Serbia."<sup>76</sup> Although Ćosić would not publicly admit it, he had come to agree with Mihiz on that point: "We in the opposition believe that Yugoslavia can only exist on the basis of the inequality of the Serbian nation. Djilas thinks that is the price of the survival of Yugoslavia. He believes that Yugoslavia deserves that Serbian sacrifice. In that we do not agree. Nor does Matija [Bećković] agree with him on that."<sup>77</sup>

It is probably not surprising that when one ventures beyond Ćosić, who chose to express himself in abstractions, one can find more subtle approaches to the problem of Serbo-Albanian relations in Kosovo. Žika Stojković, for instance, expressed a more conciliatory approach to the

Kosovo question. Where Ćosić would rhetorically argue that Serbs and Albanians needed to work together, the burden was always on the genocidal Albanians, who in Ćosić's worldview were irredeemable. Stojković argued in 1990, for instance, that "Adem Demaci was imprisoned for a while with Mihailo Djurić, and while they did not become close, Demaci knew how to respect others, even to understand their struggle. It would be better to deal with him or people like him than to organize a government only of 'our people.' A policy that constantly reiterates that there are no alternatives is incoherent. To solve the fundamental problem, they must examine various ways for transitional 'coexistence.'" Furthermore, said Stojković, "Current Serbian policy behaves as if it does not know how to act towards the enemy. It does not know, it appears, that the enemy dare not be degraded and that the ballyhooed 'differentiation' is insulting for realistic, sensible Albanians, insofar as there are any, and above all it is in vain and harmful..."<sup>78</sup> Even Mihiz, not generally a fan of subtleties, said in 1990 that "the political and territorial autonomy of Kosovo must simply be ended. But, along with that, the Shiptars must receive the right to schooling in their language, insofar as state law requires it. Even the Serbian nation in Austria-Hungary, which was a state of law, had school-church autonomy. It had state-supported grammar schools in which they learned their language, but they had to support their gymnasias, theological training, and preparatory schools."<sup>79</sup>

The remainder of the Siminovci flirted with respect for Milošević in 1989, but by 1990 had become disillusioned. Their fundamental anti-Communism undoubtedly played a role; their firm support for a parliamentary democratic Serbia led them to an active role in the formation of new parties over the course of that year. While he was never a member of the party, Mihiz spoke in favor of the Serbian Renewal Movement of Vuk Drašković on occasion. He, Popović, and several other leading Serbian intellectuals were on the Crown Council formed by the exiled Aleksandar Karadjordjević in 1992.<sup>80</sup> In 1992, Mihiz, Popović, and Stojković were all active in DEPOS, the coalition of opposition parties that led a strong and serious, but ultimately failed, challenge to the Milošević regime.

Popović, Mihiz, and Stojković all withdrew from public life at that point. Depression, especially for Mihiz, had begun to set in even before the failure of DEPOS. In July 1991, Mihiz issued a "Proposal for Consideration in Ten Points."<sup>81</sup> "What has been missed has been



missed, and what is done is done, what will be will be,” he wrote. “Out of this straitjacket in which others bound us and in which we ourselves laced ourselves with mistaken choices, provoked and unprovoked conflicts, stupid and unnecessary defeats, indecisiveness and over-decisiveness, we must once and for all unbind ourselves.” Mihiz’s ten points called for a concentration government in Serbia, new free elections, recognition of Slovenia, recognition of Croatia when Croatia recognized the rights of Croatian Serbs to secede from that state, recognition of Macedonian independence, independence for Bosnia if all nations there desire it (otherwise the Serbs could join Serbia, the Croats Croatia), that Serbia respect the rights of minorities in Serbia but not the right of secession, that Serbia announce that it recognizes that its attempts to maintain Yugoslavia have failed in the face of the will of some Yugoslav peoples, that Serbia now proclaims its independent and democratic existence as it was before 1918, and that Serbia express its readiness to negotiate the counterproposals of other Yugoslav nations.

### ĆOSIĆ BECOMES THE STORY: *TIME OF POWER*

By the end of the Bosnian war in 1995, Popović, Stojković, and Mihiz had all withdrawn from public life. Stojković was angry, Popović tired, and Mihiz depressed. In fact, Mihiz did not emerge from his room for the two years preceding his death in late 1996; Popović and Stojković followed him to their graves soon after. None of the three saw Ćosić regularly after the outbreak of war. Mihiz refused to receive Ćosić for years, until he was on the brink of death. The Simina 9a collective was not a collective in any meaningful sense of the word after the beginning of the wars of the Yugoslav succession.

Dobrica Ćosić spent the second half of the 1990s fending off accusations that he had been responsible for growth of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s and the excesses of Serbia’s wars in Croatia and Bosnia in the 1990s. His usual defense was that he had spent his life trying to impart a little truth to his people; he repeated this mantra over and over. Ćosić also sought to regain some of his relevance as Serbia’s tragic nineties progressed: he spoke (and was jeered) at demonstrations in 1996 which threatened the Milošević regime but ultimately failed, and in 1999 he demonstratively joined the student

movement *Otpor* (Resistance), which helped mightily in overthrowing Milošević in October 2000. No longer relevant at home, he enjoyed a brief period of notoriety during the NATO bombing of Kosovo. In the late 1980s and 1990s, he had flirted quietly with the idea of partition as a solution to the Kosovo problem. In 1999, with western journalists looking for anyone willing to talk with the media about Kosovo, Ćosić once again became associated with the idea of partition. The irrelevance that stalked Ćosić after the beginning of the wars in 1991 proved impossible for him to overcome. But the Writer still had the opportunity to get in his word.

*Time of Power* (Vreme vlasti) is the final volume of Dobrica Ćosić's twelve-volume Katić family saga. This segment takes up the fate of Ivan Katić after his release from Mauthausen, the German/Austrian prison camp during World War II. Along the way, it concludes the story of Milena Katić Dragović, continues the saga of Vladimir Dragović, and fleshes out the character of Dušan Katić (Adam's son, the partisan commissar of *Divisions* and *Time of Evil*). What is unique about *Time of Power*—unsettling and often trite, as well—is that Ćosić places himself in the novel. This works on one instrumental level: this segment of the saga treats years that Ćosić himself endured and has developed an idiosyncratic understanding of. But the effect is voyeuristic. Ćosić comes off as a screenwriter who has literally stepped into the television to interact with his creations. (His fascination with, and one suspects even love of, Milena Dragović is most disconcerting.) He also uses the opportunity to provide a fictional genesis for his Katić family saga: intrigued by the fate of Ivan Katić to the point of obsession, he decided to make him the centerpiece of an epic novel about Serbia. But the most disturbing thing about Ćosić's personal intervention is that he describes in himself a writer who did not exist, one whose awakening to the evils of communism came significantly earlier than Ćosić's own, which did not occur until the mid-1960s. In *Time of Power* we find him having his doubts as early as 1950, the year that Ivan Katić is imprisoned on Goli Otok.

On the most literal level, *Time of Power* describes the life of Ivan Katić after the Second World War. Freed from Mauthausen, he returns to Belgrade, where he is given a lectureship in the Law Faculty, thanks to the intervention of his cousin Dušan. His tenure there is rocky—he defends some professors who are fired for ideological rea-

sons. But then, in 1948, he is jailed and eventually sent to the island penal colony of Goli Otok. Thus Ivan spent much of his life in prisons: during the First World War in Hungary; in 1932 in Mitrovica, a prisoner of the Royal Yugoslav government; in the Second World War in Mauthausen, a prisoner of the Nazis; and after the war on Goli Otok, a prisoner of Yugoslav communists.<sup>82</sup>

*Time of Power* serves as a quite late addition to the “Goli Otok literature,” whose original contributors included Dušan Mihailović, Branko Hoffman, and Antonije Isaković. Ćosić used the character of Ivan to revisit the theme. As could be expected, Ćosić uses Ivan’s imprisonment as an occasion to examine the mental and physical brutality suffered by prisoners on the island. But for Ćosić, Ivan is more than just another human being caught in the web of postwar witch-hunts: this imprisonment, following so many others, completes the picture of Ivan as a metaphor for the Serbian century. The reason for Ivan’s arrest was apparently innocuous: after reading a morning newspaper at the height of the crisis, he told his sister that “the Stalin–Tito conflict is a classic dogmatic conflict. Such conflicts over religion can last centuries...the conflict between Stalin and Tito could last a hundred years.”<sup>83</sup> Milena, not recognizing the subversiveness of the comment, told her best friend Dušanka, who mentioned it to her son Miško Pub (Vladimir’s best friend, who executed Bogdan Dragović in *The Believer*), who in turn was now a powerful figure in the secret police.<sup>84</sup> In the hands of the police, Ivan’s off-hand remark set off alarms about his reliability; to confirm the need for his imprisonment, however, the police concocted a more convincing crime: Ivan had served the Gestapo during the war.

As Goli Otok literature, Ivan and Ćosić do nothing to advance the genre. However, as part of the Katić chronicle, Goli Otok does advance the themes that Ćosić has chosen to emphasize. The inversion of classic moral values, for instance, is perfected on the island, where communists proved to be even more evil than Nazis:

In Mauthausen, the Nazis annihilated us, but we did not have to annihilate ourselves. On Goli Otok we had to destroy ourselves. In Mauthausen we had the right to be silent and in silence to hate and not lie. On Goli Otok we did not have the right to remain silent. We had to speak and to lie. And a man has a horrible

power: self-deception. The power to see the lie as the truth, malice as sincerity, hypocrisy as trust, the denunciation of comrades and friends to the police the execution of patriotic duty...the less the intellect, the more the cleverness. There a lie is not a lie. There the absurd is seen as reality. And at that, a positive reality. There, good is evil.<sup>85</sup>

Ivan's imprisonment also becomes an opportunity for the manipulative Ćosić to revisit a moment in his own biography: his 1952 visit to Goli Otok. We have no evidence explaining Ćosić's motives in visiting the island except interviews he gave over thirty years later, in which he claimed he went out of "pure literary curiosity," to explore the possibility of writing a novel about cominformists and the Tito–Stalin split.<sup>86</sup> For the most part, the novel's Ćosić repeats the explanations given by the real-life Ćosić in those interviews. "Why not request of the government for which I fought that it enable me to find out the truth which I will turn into a novel? I appealed to a couple of powerful people in the government, told them of my literary desire and intent, and they surprised me with their understanding and enabled me to go to the Adriatic island..."<sup>87</sup> Of course, in the novel, Ivan emerges as the focus of Ćosić's curiosity. In the interviews, Ćosić describes going to Ranković, Djilas, and Kardelj to explain the horrors that he saw on the island; in the novel, Ivan's individual fate becomes central: "Ivan, I give you my word, I will speak with Djilas and Marko about you, to get your situation reexamined."<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, *Time of Power* is a novel about Ćosić, more specifically about the failure of his own idealistic hopes for communism in Yugoslavia. Ćosić (the character in the novel) had long ago decided to try to understand the nature of the regime he had helped to create by way of the fate of Ivan Katić.

The question of the guilt of Ivan Katić became for me the question of the character and moral order in which we live, and which I view as my own. If Ivan was innocently jailed and sent to some prison, then UDBa is the same as the NKVD, and order in my country is the same as that in the Soviet Union; but, if Ivan was really an agent of the Gestapo, then ...a man can be anything. In

that case, fighting and sacrificing for this animal, this idealistic project for the future, faith in a new man and a new world, is a pure absurdity! A writer, which I would like to become, cannot resolve this absurdity; the writer, whispered my demon, creates of this absurdity the drama of the man of this era of logors and secret police and writes a novel on Serbian intellectual—the tragic hero of this age.<sup>89</sup>

But by the end of *Time of Power* (which comes in 1959, following Ivan's death), with the true story of Ivan's imprisonment known to him, Ćosić had reached the worst possible conclusion: "What remained of my hopes in new government and a new man? What happened with the happy future that I fought for? The new government was a government of other people, and other people are not new people. Under the new government new evil grew."<sup>90</sup> And with that conclusion, his conviction grew that his very desire to come to an understanding of his era by writing about it was misplaced:

What happened with the young partisan who first time entered Belgrade as a war victor, believing that in those first nights without the occupier and his Serbian collaborators all people in Belgrade were happy? That youth in the English military uniform, with the red star on the Serbian cap, enjoying the comfort of the great bergeres, arrogantly imagined himself among the creators of history, founding a socialistic paradise about the three Moravas? In this armchair, out of victorious melancholy and doubts about the meaning of his life to that point, the desire to become a writer blossomed; in this armchair he decided that by participation in the creation of the history of his people, the creation of a novel of his era was assumed. Did that partisan and communist in the black armchair have the right to exchange one conceit for a greater one, believing that with a novel he could change his own fate and conquer it?<sup>91</sup>

It is difficult to know what to make of this passage, for Ćosić (the real-life one) had long claimed that the novel had been his means for coming to terms with his own historical fate; but this is just another of the

complications that we face in reading Ćosić reinvent himself via *Time of Power*.

From highest of the high to lowest of the low, Ćosić spied examples of the failure of communism in Yugoslavia. A visit to Prerovo (standing in for Velika Drenova, his hometown) elicited this response midway through the novel:

Prerovo had not changed in the spirit of my ideals; new government did not fulfill the promises which I as a partisan had given the peasants. The peasant working zadruga Red October had broken up; the village had not become a kolkhoz, nor had I become the president of the kolkhoz, which I had dreamed before the war, reading Soviet brochures. Electricity had made it to the village, but not to all houses; from every home children had gone off to school, and youth to new factories, to escape Prerovo. That wasn't much, for their hopes and sacrifices....And I ask myself: are communist goals unreachable, or are people imperfect and incapable of turning ideas into reality? Where is the great error of our century: in ideas or in people?<sup>92</sup>

From Prerovo to the halls of power, the story of betrayed promise was the same. In the novel's finale, Ćosić confronts Dušan Katić, the government minister controlling the unfair fate of Ivan Katić: "In your office [he says to Katić] I no longer see Kun's and Mujezinović's partisans, nor the scenes of the youth work actions of Boža Ilić, nor the portraits of worker heroes Mika Petrov and Branko Šotra..."<sup>93</sup> Katić responds by condemning Ćosić's subversive activities: "Modernism, and the group you hang out with have turned you into a dangerous critic. Every night you talk nonsense in the ateliers and the Club on the betrayal of the revolution, on the leadership as a new class, on the bureaucratic caste, red bourgeoisie..."<sup>94</sup> Katić insists that he "did not become a communist to take power and subjugate people...I accepted communist ideology and fought for a new government with which to change the world..." Ćosić rejects this claim: "Those excuses for your narcissism and privileges no longer work, comrade Katić."<sup>95</sup> In the end, Ćosić's prescription for Serbia, for the Balkans, is ultimately implied via the thoughts of Ivan, describing his father Vukašin:

Eight or nine decades ago, Vukašin left Prerovo for schooling in Palanka, Belgrade, Paris, and returned to Serbia with a diploma from the Sorbonne and modern ideas, intending to revive it and lead it into Europe....And like all great social and civilizational ideas of the twentieth century, which people from the edges of Europe embraced, the ideas of Vukašin Katić ended in failure and defeat....With their graves, Serbs had broadened Europe to include Serbia, and with their graves became part of it; in their sufferings for Europe they had become Europeans, and that was acknowledged of them only while they suffered.<sup>96</sup>

Implied in this depressing conclusion is the need for Serbia to work on its own regeneration, utilizing its own ideas and resources.

Ultimately, though, *Time of Power* serves as Ćosić's last contribution to his self-reinvention. How could the writer who read his own fate into that of Serbia not succumb to the seduction of rewriting his own early years under communism to further link his fate to that of his people? "Finally I decided to make myself, the author, an active participant in the dramatic work of *Time of Power*; that power was still a part of my fate, just as much as I conditioned it with the fate of my imaginary personalities."<sup>97</sup> We should keep in mind that Ćosić did not begin writing the Katić saga out of a desire to understand the fate of intellectuals like Ivan Katić—*Roots* and *Divisions* were written in the express service of the ideology in which his character in *Time of Power* claimed to have already unearthed the seeds of evil. Ćosić's imagined conversation with the powerful Dušan Katić also betrays much wishful thinking—Ćosić would not begin "talking nonsense" about the betrayal of the revolution, the red bourgeoisie, or the new class for another decade. Taken as a whole, the picture that Ćosić creates—of a writer who recognized the possibility of evil within the new regime as early as the early 1950s, and had responded to it by the end of the decade, is starkly at odds with reality (after all, Ćosić would help compose the Program of the LCY in 1956–57, and would not take his legendary trip on the Galeb until 1961). It is thus with some irony that we hear Ćosić label Ivan an egocentric personality, "and those types I can't stand even in novels."<sup>98</sup>

Indeed.

## NOTES

- 1 Ćosić, *Promene*, 63.
- 2 Ćosić, *Promene*, 64.
- 3 Ćosić, *Promene*, 69–70.
- 4 Ervin Dolenc, "Culture, Politics, and Slovene Identity," in Jill Benderley and Evan Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994) 88.
- 5 Excerpts from that edition of the journal can be found in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) March 15 and April 1, 1987.
- 6 Tomaž Mastnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," in Benderley and Kraft, *Independent Slovenia*, 106.
- 7 Mastnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," 107.
- 8 Dobrica Ćosić, "Sastanak u 'mraku'," in Dobrica Ćosić, *Srpsko pitanje—demokratsko pitanje* (Belgrade: Politika/Strucna knjiga, 1992) 70.
- 9 Ćosić, "Sastanak u 'mraku'," 73.
- 10 Dobrica Ćosić, "Pismo Niku Grafenaueru," in Ćosić, *Srpsko pitanje*, 77–78.
- 11 For one examination of this theme, see Nicholas J. Miller, "Searching for a Serbian Havel," in *Problems of Post-Communism* v. 44, no. 4 (1997) 3–11.
- 12 Dobrica Ćosić, "Srbi i Slovenci nekad i danas," in Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće*, 167 ff. From meetings in Ljubljana (October 5–6, 1987) and Belgrade (November 13, 1987).
- 13 Dobrica Ćosić, "Koliko smo mi sami krivi" in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) June 1, 1987, 4.
- 14 Dobrica Ćosić, "Na kraju 'srećne budućnosti,'" *Književne novine* (Belgrade) March 1–15, 1988, 5.
- 15 Ćosić, "Koliko smo mi sami krivi," 4.
- 16 Ćosić, *Promene*, 75.
- 17 Dobrica Ćosić, "Potreba za kritičkim razmatranjem vladajuće ideoloske koncepcije u nacionalnoj politici," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) September 15, 1987, 4.
- 18 Milorad Vučelić, "Paradigma Ćosić," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) September 15, 1987, 3.
- 19 *Slom* and *Čovek u svom vremenu*.
- 20 Ćosić, "Književnost i istorija danas," 32.
- 21 However, it must be said that in his novel *Time of Death*, he introduced the theme of Austrian genocide against the Serbs in the specific context of the First World War.
- 22 Ćosić, *Promene*, 61.
- 23 Vuk Drašković, "Jugoslavija i srpsko pitanje," in *Koekude, Srbijo* (Belgrade: Nova knjiga, 1990) 43.
- 24 Kosta Čavoški, *Tito—Tehnologija vlasti* (Belgrade: Dosije, 1990).



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- 25 Čavoški, *Tito—Tehnologija vlasti*, 5.
- 26 Ćosić, *Promene*, 23.
- 27 Ćosić: “[Kardelj] systematically, cleverly, evolutionarily, and, I would say, in a Machiavellian way worked to create a Slovenian state in the framework of Yugoslavia....After the liquidation of Ranković, those thirteen years [until Kardelj’s death] represent Kardelj’s absolute political domination of Yugoslavia.” Djukić, *Slom*, 155.
- 28 Ćosić, “Kritika vladajuće ideološke koncepcije,” 31.
- 29 Djukić, *Slom*, 149.
- 30 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 283.
- 31 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 282.
- 32 Djukić, *Slom*, 157.
- 33 Djukić, *Slom*, 161.
- 34 Djukić, *Slom*, 165.
- 35 Ćosić, *Promene*, 97.
- 36 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 178.
- 37 Zoran Sekulić, *Pad i čutnja Aleksandra Rankovića* (Belgrade: Dositej, 1989) 151.
- 38 Sekulić, *Pad i čutnja*, 186. Remember, though, that Mihajlo Švabić actually said he was “ashamed as a Serb” by Ranković, not that he was ashamed to be a Serb.
- 39 Ćosić, *Promene*, 19.
- 40 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 174.
- 41 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 174.
- 42 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 172–73.
- 43 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 177.
- 44 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 177.
- 45 From Yugoslav sources, cited in Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962–1991* 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 21.
- 46 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 307.
- 47 Dobrica Ćosić, “Ne maćem—nego duhom,” in *Knjževne novine* (November 1, 1990) 1; from his speech at receipt of the Njegoš prize, in Cetinje, October 28, 1990.
- 48 *Nezavisna svetlost* (October 6–12, 1996); quoted in Miller, “Searching for a Serbian Havel,” 5.
- 49 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 282.
- 50 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 282.
- 51 Ćosić, *Promene*, 140.
- 52 Ćosić, *Promene*, 141.
- 53 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 305.
- 54 “Šta je Ćosić stvarno rekao,” in *NIN* (Belgrade) Sept. 10, 1989, 67.
- 55 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1981–1991)*, 275.

- 56 Milovan Danajlić, "Koreni srpskog gneva," in *Nasa reč* (London) December 1988, no. 400, p. 2.
- 57 Slavoljub Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra: Politička ispovest Dobrice Ćosića* (Belgrade: Samizdat B92, 2001) 159.
- 58 Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra*, 161.
- 59 Dušan Radulović and Nebojša Spaić, *U potrazi za demokratijom* (Belgrade: Dosije, 1991) 36–38.
- 60 Radulović and Spaić, *U potrazi za demokratijom*, 36–37.
- 61 "Prilog javnoj raspravi o ustavu," in *Književne novine* (April 1, 1988) 1.
- 62 "Javni zahtev," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) January 15, 1990, 2.
- 63 Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra*, 163.
- 64 Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra*, 164.
- 65 Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra*, 168.
- 66 Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra*, 172.
- 67 "Pozdrav," in *NIN* (Belgrade) November 9, 1990, 15.
- 68 Interview in *Politika*, September 13, 1991, quoted in Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra*, 181.
- 69 Djukić, *Lovljenje vetra*, 188.
- 70 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 30–36.
- 71 For instance, Petar Nešić, "Krivica i stradanje profesora Djurića," *Intervju* (Belgrade) July 21, 1989, which examines calls for the removal of the judgment against Djurić from 1972; and "Pobeda sile duha," *Intervju* (Belgrade) December 22, 1989, which announces the return of Djurić to his position on the Law Faculty at Belgrade University.
- 72 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 198–204.
- 73 "Izveštaj o dvogodišnjem radu UKS 1986–1988," in *Književne novine* (Belgrade) June 1–15, 1988, 4.
- 74 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 172–73.
- 75 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 175.
- 76 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 218–19.
- 77 Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1981–1991)* 276.
- 78 Žika Stojković, "Život u vanrednom stanju," in Žika Stojković, *Otisci: 1951–1996* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1996) 7.
- 79 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 221.
- 80 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 337–38.
- 81 Mihiz, *Kazivanja i ukazivanja*, 319 ff.
- 82 Dobrica Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga/Alfa, 1997) 37.
- 83 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 113.
- 84 One is reminded of the fate of Meša, the main character in Emir Kusturica's "When Father Was Away on Business," who, upon seeing a political cartoon in *Politika* which portrayed Marx sitting at a writing desk with a portrait of Stalin on his wall, said "now they've gone too far." Meša was sent to a labor camp when his mistress retold the story to the wrong

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policeman (Meša's brother-in-law Zijo). It was a better story the first time around.

85 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 132.

86 Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 57–72; the quote is from Radovan Popović, *Vreme pisca: Životopis Dobrice Ćosića* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 2000) 24.

87 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 96.

88 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 103.

89 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 94–95.

90 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 326–27.

91 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 420.

92 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 181.

93 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 435.

94 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 435.

95 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 436.

96 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 320–21.

97 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 421.

98 Ćosić, *Vreme vlasti*, 297.



## CHAPTER 11

# The Legend of Simina 9a in Serbia's Modern History

Dobrica Ćosić was the most important intellectual figure in Serbia's nationalist revival; he was a prolific writer and speaker, where Popović and Mihiz were merely very productive and truly sporadic, respectively. But Mihiz and Popović led Ćosić to his final destination, as a revivalist and a nationalist. Mihiz, who changed little intellectually over the four decades treated in this book, led the way—without his critical attitude towards Titoism and his healthy vision of the Serbian nation as a valid and valuable moral center in Serbian and Yugoslav public life, Ćosić would have had no exemplar. Popović was the first to follow Mihiz and, in spite of Ćosić's reputation, probably preceded Ćosić as a Serbian revivalist. The themes that would come to dominate Ćosić's work, in other words, were those that Mihiz had always embraced and those that Popović translated into a useful vision for Ćosić.

It is thus no surprise to note that of the *siminovci*, the people I have called “nonconformists” and who provide a unifying focus for the book, Ćosić was the exception to all of the rules in the beginning. While most of them were willing to consider the possibility that communism could bring positive results in Yugoslavia, none of them was the fiery true believer that Ćosić was. Others, like Popović, Stojković, and Mihajlo Djurić, did travel a path from the left to the nation; but Ćosić's path was the most remarkable. It is my argument in this book that he was ultimately led to his destination by a disappointment whose boundaries and whose nature were conditioned by the ideas and cultural production of his peers. The fact that he ultimately dominated the Serbian intellectual opposition renders an understanding of the other nonconformists' roles more rather than less imperative, regardless their fade from view by the late 1980s.

I fear that the story has left many issues open, not all of them easy to resolve. Here's one attempt at a generalization: together, Dobrica Ćosić, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Mića Popović, and dozens of other Serbian intellectuals invented an identity for Serbs emerging from the communist era. They engaged in a project which Ćosić might have referred to as the engineering of a spiritual renaissance. They also consciously offered themselves, and encouraged others to offer them, as bearers of a special collection of truths, gleaned from a lifetime of experience as freethinkers, as a collective model for Serbs seeking to fit a failed era of social, political, and cultural experiment into their understanding of their more distant past.

Beyond that, questions abound. One involves the *siminovci* themselves. They were but a subset of that generation of Serbian intellectuals, but they clung to the notion that they were special. They presented themselves as bearers of the "most serious values" of their generation, in the words of Mića Popović. The validity of the nonconformists' claims to special status—Were they *really* freethinkers? Was there *really* anything meaningful in their shared origins? Did their experience with communism *really* bless them with any sort of special knowledge of the system's workings and failures?—must be considered, as must the reasons why those claims were accepted by their peers, bestowing upon them a special credibility which made their world view inspiring to others around them. This, I suppose, is the "influence" question, and is one that is inherently difficult to answer, no matter the context. But, if their influence is difficult to assess, there is an alternative way of evaluating their importance, and that is to take the obvious for granted—these were influential men—and move on to the question of what we can learn from their experiences, from the trajectory of their intellectual engagement over the entire period of the communist experiment in Yugoslavia.

What was the meaning of Simina 9a? Were its inhabitants just accidental travellers down a similar path to the nation? Or did Simina 9a itself—a two-year long experiment in bohemian coexistence in trying times—play a role in forging these personalities and their approaches to communism in Yugoslavia? There is only one certain answer to that question: the idea of Simina 9a appeared in certain conditions and remained active and relevant so long as those conditions existed. In other words, in 1974 Ćosić chose to give life to the idea that Simina 9a had

meaning when it was important for him to propose to Serbs that there was such a thing as an authentic freethinker in Serbia. That notion was taken up by others—including other siminovci, but also journalists and other writers—and turned into something of a local legend until a time when it no longer told a story that was considered important for Serbs to hear, which was when the war broke out. So, for approximately fifteen years, the story had meaning and was told with purpose. The siminovci, cast as nonconformists, heretics, or people without compass, offered a usable history for a generation of Serbs contesting communist political power in Yugoslavia. Once that power was gone, the “legendary Simina 9a” was never referred to publicly again, except in memoirs written by its principals. Beyond that? Were the siminovci really representatives of the “most serious values” of their generation? Instead of attempting to answer the impossible question, I will, like any good academic, attempt to reduce it to some usable components. What did the siminovci share, what did they not? What made their intellectual development unique? What can they tell us about the nasty Serbian 1980s and 1990s? What can they tell us about their own—and others’—descent into an obtuse and exclusivistic nationalism?

Several points matter. First, they shared little at the beginning (in 1946) and a lot at the end (1985, let’s say). They themselves have made much of their diverse origins, and there is no reason to question them on this point. The little that they shared, however, seems important: they were contrarians. Only Ćosić, the “lightning rod,” the “true believer,” the measuring stick for the others’ nonconformity, lacked that streak. But in the end, they all converged on a position that they expressed in their cultural and intellectual lives: that Serbia had lost something precious under the impress of communism (or the Tito regime in particular), and that it was the role of culture and cultural figures to guide Serbs’ back to that which was lost, which was their cultural essence. The fact that Ćosić became the leader of this pack of nonconformists inspires a vision of him, the complete conformist, being picked at by the work and ideas and daily coexistence with men he loved until he finally went over to them, like the reformed smoker of the American popular imagination.

Second, they tell us something critical about Serbia’s 1980s and 1990s. They tell us, first, that Serbian nationalism is not bred into the genetic code of Serbs. These were all men who were willing to let com-

munism have its chance—even Mihiz, who was the single inveterate opponent of the ideology among the siminovci. They also tell us that even as nationalists, which they unquestionably were by the late 1960s in most cases, they were reactive rather than essential nationalists. I mean by this to draw a distinction between the nationalists of the western imagination who are, simply, nationalistic, and the nationalists of the real world who respond to real conditions. These guys did not re-read the Kosovo cycle, or *The Mountain Wreath*, and derive their actions as intellectuals, cultural creators, and political actors from lessons learned centuries before. They responded directly to what they saw happening to Serbia under the Tito regime. In other words, they need not have been nationalists. This simple conclusion wreaks havoc with many of the platitudes that have been applied to Serbs over the past two decades.

Their descent into nationalism demands comparisons with other intellectuals in similar conditions, throughout Eastern Europe, who started out on the same path and ended up on humanistic, universalist positions. After all, what differentiates the trajectories of Ćosić and, say, Adam Michnik and Václav Havel is not their beginnings. They all recognized the unpleasant realities of Stalinist governance in their milieus. They all identified the absence of truthful communication as the key problem in that style of governance (“Truth” would be their shared goal.) Yet by the end of the Stalinist day, Michnik and Havel were understood to be humanists, Ćosić a bloodthirsty nationalist. Why? I would suggest that the conditions in which they all operated determined their ends. They all sought Truth. But Michnik and Havel were absolved of the need to tell ethnic truths by the fact that their societies did not suffer the burden of ethnic lies. The promises of Polish or Czech communism had nothing to do with nationalism; the betrayals of those regimes were betrayals of ordinary working people. Can we say the same about Serbia or Yugoslavia as a whole? Hardly. The Tito regime promised an end to nationalism, and it failed. And it told lots of lies in the process of failing. The descent of Serbia’s intellectuals into an exclusivistic nationalism was structurally predetermined. This is not at all to say that under different conditions, Ćosić, for instance, would have been like Havel. It *is* to say that under different conditions, other Serbs would likely have risen to relevance.

Theory can help us. Serbs have rarely drawn the attention of theorists of nationalism. Nonetheless, even if Serbs have not been christened



this or that sort of nationalists by theorists, they have emerged from the 1990s with two sets of descriptors attached to them by journalists, scholars, and politicians, and those descriptors conform to the general outlines of current theoretical discourse. Serbs are either the captives of “ancient hatreds” or the manipulated victims of modern state-builders. By now most of us no doubt laugh at the notion that ancient hatreds were the catalyst to the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and nod approvingly at the suggestion that nationalism was merely a piece of Slobodan Milošević’s strategy in his consolidation of power in Serbia during the 1980s. Thus for most of us the Serbian nationalist movement of the 1980s and 1990s confirms the position of the “modernists” among nationalism theorists, who argue that nationalism and national identity are functions of the actions of modern states.<sup>1</sup> I would argue now that we should neither uncritically accept modernist conclusions regarding Serbian nationalism nor dismiss out of hand variations on the disreputable “ancient hatreds” (or in theoretical terms, primordialist) approach. It is the perennialists, who believe that national identity (variously defined) has existed either continuously or on a recurring basis throughout history, who provide the real competition for modernism.<sup>2</sup>

There exist many treatments of Serbia and its recent nationalism with implied theoretical commitments. Antinationalist Serbian intellectuals support the modernist version. Nenad Dimitrijević, for instance, has argued that communist regimes “turned toward the past” in order to “compensate for [their] own inability to thematize reality.” “Nationalism,” for Dimitrijević, “was the only form of ideological communication that offered common ground for the regime and its subjects.”<sup>3</sup> Eric Gordy asserts that the Milošević regime exploited “nationalist rhetoric” in order to attain and maintain power.<sup>4</sup> Bogdan Denitch blames the nationalist leaders of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia for “having unleashed and mobilized nationalist separatism and hatreds...”<sup>5</sup> These are all responsible, well-argued analyses with which I disagree. Sometimes the approach is taken too far, however, as in the case of *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* by V.P. Gagnon, which appeared in 2004. Gagnon argues that ethnicity, whose existence he does not deny, had nothing to do with the wars of the 1990s. Instead, Slobodan Milošević concocted ethnic crises in order to derail truly reformist agendas in the Serbian party (he also examines the Croatian case). Gagnon is not making the common argument that Milošević nurtured

an ethnic nationalism that otherwise would have been muted; he is arguing, it seems, that the very existence of ethnic nationalism was a ruse, that even that which others have credited as political creations did not really exist. His argument is too complex and requires him to reinterpret much of the 1990s tendentiously. For us, he has simply taken the “nationalism is a political creation” approach as far as it can go. The general tendency of most observers of the Serbian situation in the 1980s and 1990s is to argue that the primary force at work was the state, from which we should infer that nationalism was a handy but artificial tool for politicians.

In other places we find a near endorsement of the primordialist position. Perhaps the most popular book about Serbia to emerge from the collapse of Yugoslavia was the journalist Tim Judah's *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*.<sup>6</sup> Judah's thesis is that history is alive for the Serbian people. Although Judah makes no theoretical claims, he does ultimately offer an antimodernist vision. While he endorses the modernists' claim that power in Serbia manipulated historical images to gain and maintain power, his book really discusses how and why those images resonate with Serbs. Although this would seem to make it a nice antidote to the modernist's love affair with the notion that all nationalist tradition is invented, in fact, he turns most of his evidence to a simplistic demonstration of how the ugliness of Serbia's present was well-nigh preordained by its past. A second book that emerged from the 1990s with some influence was Branimir Anzulović's *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*,<sup>7</sup> which offers a litany of historical examples of Serbs' slide into genocidal mania. Anzulović, like Judah, has the opportunity to show how the simplistic modernist paradigm fails before the evidence, but he misses it thanks to his inability to resist the propagandist's urge to reduce all and sundry to the theme of Serbs' genocidal nature. Other examples of this approach include the recent book by Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, an otherwise sophisticated book that argues a straight line development of a genocidal mentality from the Kosovo cycle to Njegoš and bases it on a misreading of the source texts.<sup>8</sup> If primordialists believe that national character is constant and unwavering, then Judah, Anzulović, and Weitz are primordialists. And so are the dozens of politicians and journalists who have put forth similar arguments in order to justify policy choices or to simplify a complicated situation.

Do the siminovci tell us anything useful, theoretically speaking? The picture that emerges from my project is sloppy—probably too sloppy to be confined by a single theoretical approach, which is, actually, one of my points. I can hardly use my subjects to define “Serbian nationalism” in the 1980s/90s. They were one loose-knit circle of intellectuals who collectively accomplished one limited but critical task: they provided a set of images that informed a Serbian self-definition as a degraded people, humiliated, divided, in need of cultural and political renewal. As such, they were, I suppose, part of a broader nationalist event, along with the political force who eventually coopted their ideas and influence, Slobodan Milošević. “Serbian nationalism” was a multifaceted work in progress throughout the 1980s and 1990s, more like a process than a singular phenomenon.

As one component of a nationalist movement, the work of the siminovci was limited to (1) creating—in words and pictures—a portrait of a divisive (fratricidal) Serbian people; (2) arguing that “bolshevism” had degraded the Serbian nation by exploiting Serbs’ essential divisiveness; (3) preparing Serbs for the appearance of a leader who could overcome their recent heritage, both mundane and exalted, of degradation. It seems to me that this is something we can work with. Perhaps the first step would be to clarify exactly what this simple outline excludes, which is the possibility that the modern Serbian nationalist movement was the creation/manipulation of Slobodan Milošević (which would be a crude modernist position). In fact, the movement preceded its embrace by the politician. It may be true that the movement would have gone nowhere, it may be true that the politician thereafter manipulated it, but the movement existed, independently. Thus the most extreme modernist variations are irrelevant in this case.

The fact that the movement existed independently does not make it possible to eliminate the more general modernist approaches—for instance, it does not render Eric Gellner’s global version, or Ernest Hobsbawm’s dismissive modernism, inapplicable. But it does force us to consider narrower aspects of the modernist approach more carefully, and it may well demonstrate the implicit weakness of the more general modernist case. Because the movement led in part by the siminovci (and obviously others) fueled the politics of Slobodan Milošević, it is important in its own right. The most critical aspect of the movement becomes its authenticity—as opposed to its invented, its imaginary, or

its contingent quality. When Eric Gordy argued that Milošević used nationalist rhetoric to maintain power, he provided us with our entrée. Was it rhetoric? The key is to determine how invented or imagined these traditions were/are. If they are more real than imagined, we must work with that destabilizing fact.

In this context, I would argue as follows. First, the negative responses of my subjects to developments in Yugoslavia were originally rational (as opposed to hysterical, unreasonable, or fantastic). Till 1968, their criticisms were directed at particular and real abuses by the Tito regime. In other words, for those Serbs like Ćosić who counted on Tito to render nationalism irrelevant in Yugoslavia, the constitutional amendments passed between 1971 and 1974 and the Constitution of 1974 were a clear surrender. And Popović was right that the regime had failed miserably to provide for Yugoslavs, and the existence of guest workers really did indicate that failure. Mihiz, as always, stands apart in this sense, since he was never really disillusioned by a regime he never really liked. But the early responses of Ćosić and Popović to the Tito regime appear lucid and only potentially nationalistic. The alternative would be to describe them as either thoroughly deluded (which they were not) or manipulated from the beginning (which is an occasional accusation: a Serbian novelist named Svetislav Basara has written a novel entitled *Looney Tunes*, in which a character known as the Great Dissident [Ćosić] gets his orders in secret from a faction within the party<sup>9</sup>). But the original logic of their opposition to Titoism renders the argument that these men, and others like them, were either irrational or incited by others with ulterior motives (politicians vying for power) untenable.

Second, their focus was culture, and they were above all creative; there is no evidence that they sought power, although one could be forgiven for suspecting that Ćosić would not have minded leading his people at some point, in some way, as he would in 1992–93. In this sense I would argue that, regardless the outcome of their work, their intent was to force Serbs to look inward in a search of their own shared historical cultural traditions for continuity with their past. Their goal was to inspire cultural regeneration; their belief was that this regeneration would revitalize and strengthen their community. The results of their engagement were certainly to contribute to a violent series of reckonings throughout former Yugoslavia, but my purpose here is not

to assign blame, it is to examine the nature of a nationalist event. This one focused on cultural continuity rather than political empowerment or the simple desire for personal power on the part of its movers.

Third (relatedly), their work was introspective rather than aggressive. While it is part and parcel of all examinations of national movements to note that nations define themselves against the “other,” and the Serbian movement of the 1980s certainly involved the “essentialization” of Albanians, Croats, and Muslims, it seems to me that the primary concern of Ćosić, Popović, Mihiz, and many other participants in the Serbian movement was to essentialize Serbs—as degraded, requiring a revival, as having been moved backward on the civilizational scale by evil bolshevism. Once thus essentialized, or possessing an understanding of their role in their own degradation, Serbs could move on to the more essential task of rebirth. For Ćosić, the goal remained becoming modern; for Popović it became to regain lost dignity; for Mihiz, it was to maintain Serbia’s preexisting ties to modernity.

Fourth, we must recognize that Ćosić, Popović, and Mihiz not only argued for continuity with a Serbian past (nationalists always make this argument), but also that their work cannot be understood without the presence of that past. They did so in different ways, but never really as manipulators or propagandists (yes, they had their propagandistic moments—one thinks of *May 1, 1985*, or Ćosić’s showy self-deprecation, but those moments do not define their project). Their work is best understood as reflecting the creative integration of older (even “ancient”) images singular to Serbian culture with Serbian modernity, as part of a process of addressing entirely modern problems faced by that nation. The resonance of Ćosić’s fratricidal metaphor with a broad audience of intellectuals and ordinary people in Serbia must be attributed to a great degree to the similarity of his imagery to that of the Kosovo cycle, where internecine struggle, individual sacrifice, mendacious betrayals, and collective punishments and suffering first entered the Serbian cultural canon, never to leave it. Whether consciously or not—and I suspect it was unconscious, since Ćosić never explicitly endorsed or exploited the medieval Kosovo imagery in his work—the influence of a thoroughly pre-modern cultural corpus is obvious and is frankly impossible to imagine as an invention. Popović’s *Scenes*, which initially avoided romanticizing (nationalizing) their subjects, became ever more national as the painter embraced the same imagery of division and betrayal that Ćosić adopted.

From another perspective, we can see that Mihiz did not romanticize his characters, did not propose that they provided models for modern behavior. He modernized "Banović Strahinja" rather than allowing the romance of history to take over. This is a distinction that was lost on other intellectuals of the nationalist revival.<sup>10</sup> Mihiz explicitly chose to update *Banović Strahinja*, and he did so to modernize a piece of poetry that was beloved by Serbs, but he did not do so as a way of "nationalizing" moderns in the usual romantic way. He chose instead to impose a modern and universal understanding on that which was ancient. The combination of unimagined grievances, integrated ancient/modern imagery, and cultural focus seems to me to indicate that these men reflect deep continuities in a nationally Serbian historical experience.

The point in nationalism theory where my case contributes is thus where modernism has become most seductive: in the notion that nations are "invented" or "imagined." My case study cannot be explained by Hobsbawm's "invented tradition," which serves as the basis for his argument that modern states piece together national identities in order to homogenize their diverse societies. There is too much continuity—which even Hobsbawm has conceded—in Serbian identity over centuries to satisfy his belief that almost anything will succeed in the process of homogenization if it has the force of the modern state behind it.<sup>11</sup> Rogers Brubaker's modernist argument that nations are a contingent category fails the Serbian case for the same reason.<sup>12</sup> Benedict Anderson's more positive formulation, that nations are "imagined communities," is quite different than Hobsbawm's and obviously Brubaker's. Anderson argues that all communities "larger than primordial villages" are imagined because their members will never know each other personally; thus, their connections are imagined.<sup>13</sup> He describes the historical process by which older (but also imagined) communities gave way to the modern national variety: the decline of religious community and the dynastic realm, coupled with the emergence of a popular press, made the imagined community of the nation possible. The success of Anderson's appealing image has led to the simplistic application of his idea, often as virtually interchangeable with Hobsbawm's. In fact, while Anderson sees nations as modern, he never argues that an imagined community has no continuity with previous ones, nor does he argue that imagination is necessarily just a tool in the hands of modern statebuilders. Unlike Hobsbawm, Anderson allows

for the possibility that nations follow logically, without explicit human agency, from earlier types of identity.

In his study of twentieth-century Yugoslavism, Andrew Wachtel offered the view that "the nation [is] not [a] political entity but [a] state of mind, an 'imagined community'" à la Benedict Anderson, which means for him that national identity is always "up for grabs."<sup>14</sup> Wachtel agrees, though, that the identity must resonate with the population: "...elites cannot merely impose national consciousness; rather, they propose a national definition, basing it on existing and invented traditions, and the chosen population accepts, modifies, or rejects the definition..<sup>15</sup> This would seem consistent with Anderson's formulation, and the end result for the subject of Wachtel's inquiry, Yugoslavia, bears out that the Yugoslav definition did not resonate with Serbs in the end. But there is one insurmountable if arcane problem with Anderson's definition, and that is his argument regarding the place of the nation in historical development: in the Serbian case, the community/tradition in question preceded the death of monarchy and the advent of print culture, which Anderson considers prerequisites.

The one existing theoretical perspective that can successfully accommodate the Serbian case is, unsurprisingly, the result of mediation between the current extremes in nationalism theory. Anthony D. Smith has proposed what he calls an "ethnosymbolic" approach to the study of national identity and nationalism. "Modern nations are not created ex nihilo," Smith explains; "they have premodern antecedents that require investigation in order to establish the basis on which they were formed."<sup>16</sup> The ethnosymbolist agrees that some nations are modern and that nationalism is a modern ideology, but rejects the blanket argument that there is no relationship between preexisting ethnic identities and modern national ones. Instead, in Smith's formulation, "recurrence, continuity, [and] appropriation...are the ways in which the past is related to the present, and it may be an ancient and self-remembered past that must be recovered and authenticated."<sup>17</sup> Smith emphasizes the legitimacy rather than the inventedness of myths, memories, and symbols; an identity cannot be invented out of whole cloth provided by the state, it must instead be founded upon a structure that will support the weight of continuous or intermittent historical traditions within a given group.

Ethnosymbolism helps us to explain Serbia's 1980s without resort to emotionally satisfying but also reductionist and horrifying interpretations that argue that Serbs are captives of their history; it also enables us to avoid the unconstructive argument that nationalism in Serbia was somehow illegitimate, the product of state manipulation. As neither an absolute nor a fiction, nationalism in Serbia in the 1980s becomes a legitimate—if ugly—part of Serbia's long history, but one which can be explained rather than essentialized. The *siminovci* were not the only nationalists in Serbia in the 1980s. But, as cultural revivalists who were disinterested in political power, they provide an opportunity to extract something positive from the general Serbian experience of extremism and horror (to which they unquestionably contributed). Their existence assures us, perhaps paradoxically, that there is a potential better future out there for their people. Serbs are neither modernist putty in the hands of powerful elites nor primordially genocidal. If the traditions that were put to use by Ćosić, Popović, and their colleagues produced horrors, the project for the Serbian future is to find traditions, myths, and/or symbols that will allow for a different outcome: a new revival, built on a different but equally legitimate understanding of the Serbian past.

There have been other works on this general topic, and I ought to point out that mine is not the only one adopting (even if implicitly) this particular theoretical perspective. Jasna Dragović Soso's *'Saviours of the Nation': Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (2002) surveys the broader landscape of Serbian intellectual engagement and the growth of nationalism in the 1980s. Her even-handed treatment is by far the best available, but we do differ. She expresses surprise that the Serbian intellectual elite embraced Milošević, whose antidemocratic politics and persecution of intellectuals before his ascent to the leadership of the party in Serbia would seem to have disqualified him in the eyes of those intellectuals.<sup>18</sup> She attributes their support of him to his studied wooing of leading intellectuals, rather than to the explicit appeal of his policies and his rhetoric. Dragović Soso thus questions why Serbia's intellectuals failed to respect the democratic norms that they apparently espoused. She does not address what I view as the real process at work. Instead of being failures at democracy, my principals (and, I would argue, a majority of Serbia's nationalist intellectuals) were actually engaged in a creative process all their own, not



conditioned by the demands of democracy but rather conditioned by their perceptions of the nature and needs of the Serbian nation. In other words, a desire for democracy did not drive the nationalist revival, the national revival was a goal in and of itself, producing its own imperatives. Thus, when people like Ćosić argued that Serbs were in essence democratic people (as he did, on numerous occasions), he did not mean that they were Western parliamentarians to the depths of their souls, he meant that their souls were one, that they both understood and required a collective sense of unity, that *within* their nation they were democrats—not that *between their nation and others* they were fundamentally democratic. Working this theme over the course of two decades, Ćosić and others literally created a new national identity for Serbs, rooted in and growing out of their collective twentieth-century experiences. This was a creative process, not a reactive one. We should not be asking how it is that Serbian intellectuals claimed to be democratic and acted otherwise, or fell short of their goal. We should be asking about their self-image, even their *self-essentialization* as democrats. This book is an attempt to do so.

### ĆOSIĆ: FINAL ACCOUNTS

Ćosić has been the subject of ridicule throughout the 1990s, as Serbs and others try to alternately explain the wars or distance themselves from them. Mirko Kovač, a Serbian writer who opposed Milošević, wrote in 1996 that “a nation that desires lies found in Dobrica Ćosić a writer without rival.”<sup>19</sup> Several months later Ćosić was shouted down as he spoke to demonstrators against Milošević’s theft of yet another election: “for shame!,” “leave...!”<sup>20</sup> As the 1990s passed, more and more sophisticated arguments emerged, especially in literature. They built on the original accusation of sycophancy that was leveled at Ćosić by Danilo Kiš in 1986, “The Poet of the Revolution on the President’s Boat,” which cuttingly memorialized Ćosić’s trip around Africa on Tito’s “Galeb” in 1961. In this vein, Svetislav Basara (mentioned above) and David Albahari wrote novels in which Ćosić (explicitly in Basara, implicitly in Albahari) actually takes orders from the Serbian party, enabling it to transmit its new vision to the Serbian people.<sup>21</sup> Ćosić did not help himself with such self-parodying acts as his membership in the student opposition group Otpor in 2000, and his con-

stant reiterations of the assertion that he merely “tried to tell his people some truth.”

Of course, there is a much more serious side to this reckoning, one that has to be accomplished. Presenting Ćosić and his work as I have done (I hope, in other words, dispassionately) in this book tempts one to fail to state the obvious. Whether it is possible to assess Ćosić’s influence on Serbian political and cultural life, it is more than possible to run down the list of tragic choices he made, from his clinical and not fully explained visit to Goli Otok to his cheerleading for people like Ranković and Krcun over Djilas; his nurturing of Karadžić in Bosnia, his endorsement of Milošević over Ante Marković in 1990–91, his failure—obvious and tragic—to acknowledge the crimes of the wars that he helped prepare in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. But Ćosić has always been most effective when speaking most broadly about matters of the spirit. So, instead of ridiculing or ignoring Ćosić, people like Basara and Albahari and Kovač and others like them ought perhaps to take his advice—predictable, applicable, and exasperating all at once: “The fateful question is with whom to begin the rebirth of Serbia?... Serbia needs capable people with new ideas and visions of a new politics for an educated, civilized, and democratic society. And such people are mostly outside current political parties, people who do not aspire to power but rather are the weapons of rebirth.”<sup>22</sup> The validity of these sentiments from 1999, so similar to sentiments that Ćosić had issued ten and twenty years before, cannot be denied. Let’s hope that the response this time is more humane.

## NOTES

- 1 Commonly-cited examples of the modernist approach include Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), E.J. Hobsbawm’s *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). Regarding Eastern Europe, add Rogers Brubaker’s *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Miroslav Hroch’s *Social Conditions of National Re-*

- vival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- 2 Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 159–165. Perennialists include John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982; Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Anthony D. Smith in his many books and articles.
- 3 Nenad Dimitrijević, “Words and Death: Serbian Nationalist Intellectuals,” in Andras Bozoki, ed., *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999) 123
- 4 Eric Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999) 11.
- 5 Bogdan Denitch, *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 150.
- 6 Tim Judah’s *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). For more extensive comment, see Nick Miller, “Beyond Journalism,” in *East European Politics and Societies* v. 13, no. 3 (Fall 1999) 609.
- 7 Branimir Anzulović, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). I reviewed this book for H-Net in 1999 (<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=1923926098751>).
- 8 Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Weitz’s first hardcover edition broadly and lengthily asserted that the brutal passages of *The Mountain Wreath* drew their force from the Kosovo cycle; the problem is that the Kosovo cycle is not mentioned in *The Mountain Wreath*; nor is the Kosovo cycle brutal. This sort of misuse of evidence that he apparently had not actually read was surprising is a book of its stature, but the fact that no expert on Serbian history read it (according to the acknowledgments) before publication was depressingly telling. Weitz addressed the problem in the paperback edition of the book.
- 9 Svetislav Basara, *Looney Tunes: Manično-paranoična istorija srpske književnosti u periodu od 1979.–1990. godine* (Beograd: Dereta: 1997).
- 10 As was the case with a petition issued by a group of Serbian intellectuals in 1986 bemoaning the fate of the Serbs of Kosovo; one prominent victim of Albanian excesses was memorialized as the new mother of the Jugovićs, another as the new Deacon Avakum.
- 11 Hobsbawm once allowed that Serbia was an exception to the modernist rule. See *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 75–76.

- 12 "...to focus on nationness not as substance but as institutionalized form; not as collectivity but as practical category; not as entity but as contingent event." Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 16.
- 13 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
- 14 Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 2.
- 15 Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 3. I make the same point regarding nineteenth-century Serbian, Croatian, and Yugoslav nationalisms in *Between Nation and State: Serbian Politics in Croatia before the First World War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997) pp. 30–33.
- 16 Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 2000) 63.
- 17 Smith, *The Nation in History*, 64.
- 18 Dragović Soso, 'Saviours of the Nation,' 206.
- 19 Mirko Kovač, "Između čoveka i Mesije," *Naša borba* (Belgrade) October 12–13, 1996).
- 20 "Ne sme proliti nijedna kap krvi!," *Naša borba* (Belgrade) November 24, 1996).
- 21 David Albahari, *Mrak* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga/Alfa, 1997); Basara, *Looney Tunes*.
- 22 Dobrica Ćosić, *Za preporod Srbije sa novim ljudima u novom društvu* (Belgrade: Naš Dom, 1999) 9–10.

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## Abbreviations key:

A. Lazar Trifunović, *Slikarstvo Miće Popovića* (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauke i umetnosti, 1983)

B. Heinz Klunker, *Mića Popović* (Belgrade: Jugoslovenska revija, 1989)

In the following lists, the painting titles are followed by the date of composition, then the letter A or B indicate source, followed by page number.

1. *Self-Portrait with Mask* (1947, A, 155)
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6. *Horizontal Movement* (1968, A, 139)
7. *At the Beginning of May This Year in a Circle of Friends* (1971, B, 72–73 and 196–97)
8. *Vuk* (1970, A, 198)
9. *Gvozden Relieves Himself Before His Trip Begins* (1970, A, 200)
10. *Gvozden Peeps into a Brothel* (1973, B, 178–79)
11. *Gvozden Crosses the Street* (1974, A, 223)
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16. *Sparrows* (1974, A, 230)
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18. *Two-Year Guarantee* (1978, A, 239)
19. *In Front of the Wall* (1978, B, 173)
20. *The Last Leaf* (1978, A, 242)
21. *Great Red Jump* (1979, B, 133)

22. *Serbs in a Waiting Room* (1978, B, 101)
23. *The Discovery of Breughel* (1974, A, 225)
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25. *No, Thanks* (1977, B, 199)
26. *Manipulation* (1979, B, 95)
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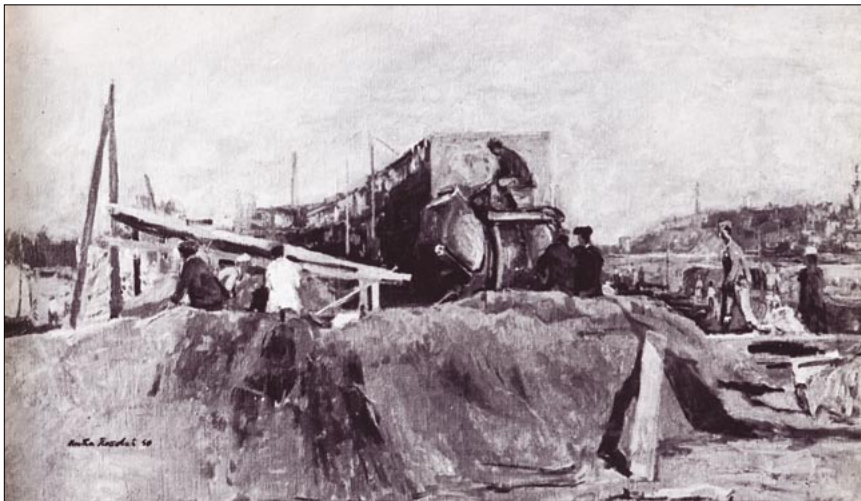
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*1. Self-Portrait With Mask*



*2. Citizens*



*3. New Belgrade*



*4. Girl*

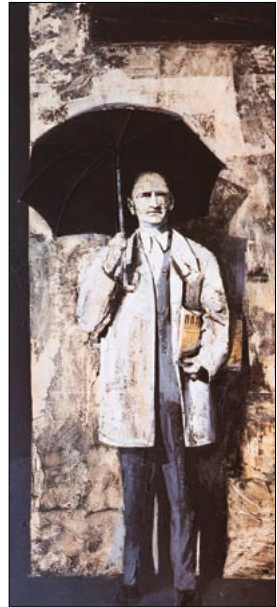




5. *Honor Guard*



6. *Horizontal Movement*



7. *At the Beginning of March This Year in a Circle of Friends*  
(from left to right: Dobrica Ćosić, Antonije Isaković, Lazar Trifunović,  
Žika Stojković, Mića Popović, and Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz)





8. *Vuk*



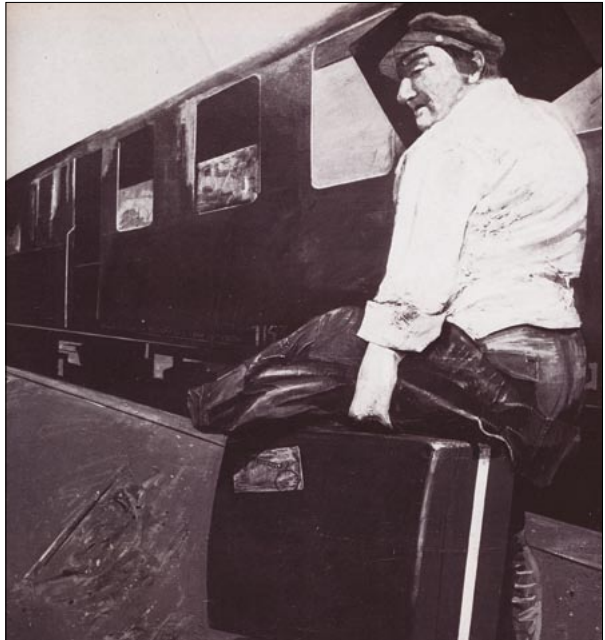
9. *Gvozden Relieves Himself Before  
His Trip Begins*



10. *Gvozden Peeps into a Brothel*



*11. Gvozden Crosses  
the Street*



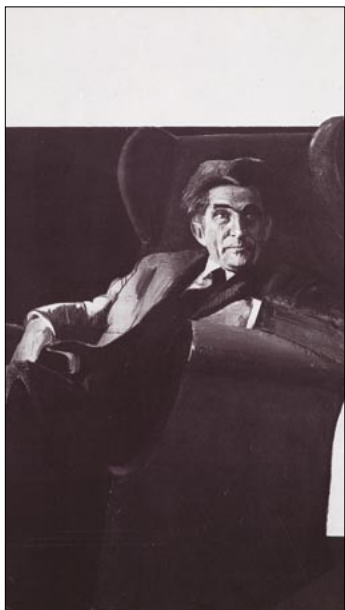
*12. Gvozden Goes on  
a Temporary Stay*



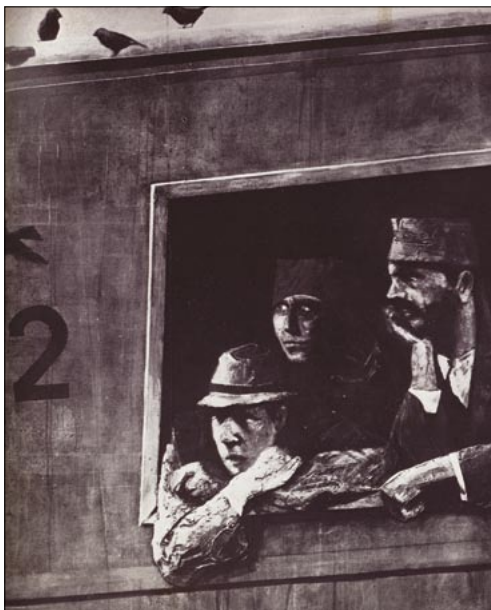
*13. Gvozden Dreams*



*14. Jevrem*



15. *Professor Mihailo Djurić*



16. *Sparrows*

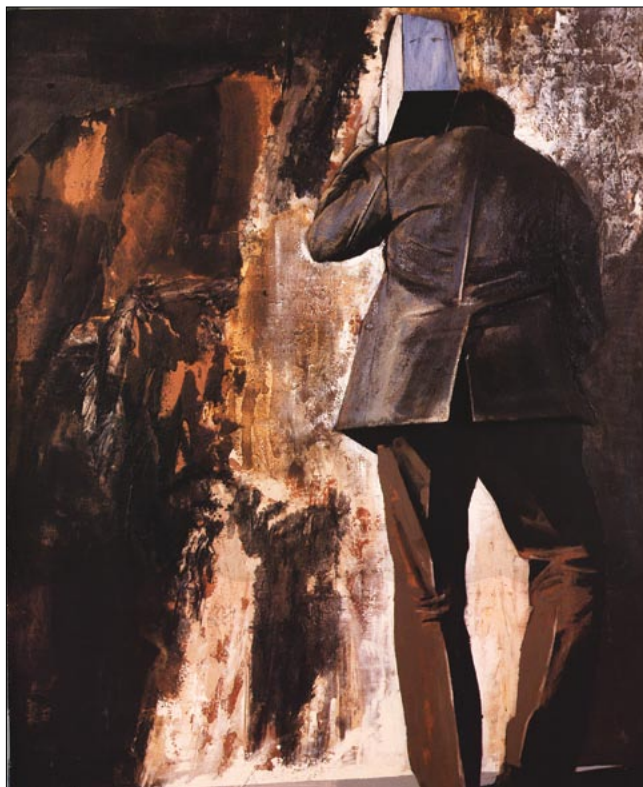


17. *Second Class*





*18. Two-Year Guarantee*



*19. In Front  
of the Wall*



20. *The Last Leaf*



21. *Great Red Jump*





*22. Serbs in a Waiting Room*



*23. The Discovery of Breughel*



*24. Urbanism*

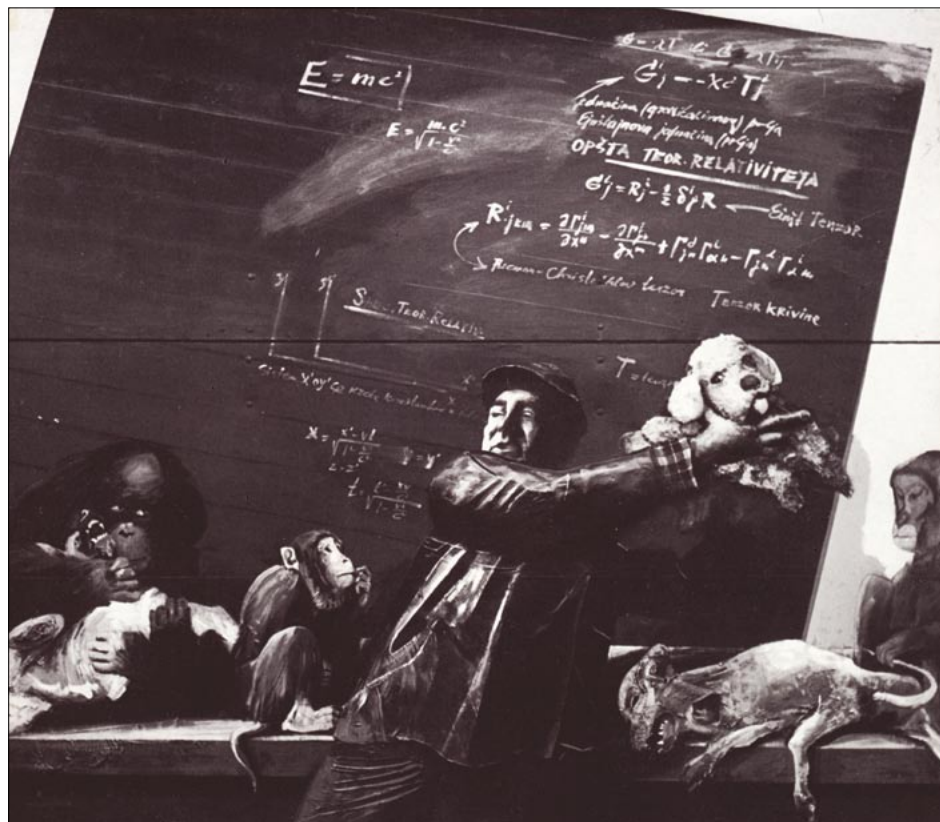


25. *No, Thanks*



26. *Manipulation*





27. Gvozden Saves a Poodle or the General and Specific Theory of Relativity



28. Last Supper without a Savior



29. May 1, 1985



30. Ćosić scrubs himself clean  
with an Otpor brush  
(cartoon by Corax, 2000)